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# Making Waves

**By Frank Bures**

**San Francisco photos by Viviane Oh**

**Mexico City photos by Bernadette Pampuch**

In downtown San Francisco, Chris Arnold '92 wakes up to the radio. He rolls over and looks at the clock: 6:40 a.m.

He knows the voice coming from the radio, even though his mind is thick with sleep. It's repeating words he's heard a hundred times over the past week, about Stephen Bright, a big-shot Washington lawyer who gave up his practice to revive the Southern Center for Human Rights.

The voice cuts to Bright talking about an HIV-positive man who was arrested for shoplifting, put in a cell with tubercular cellmates, denied his AIDS medication, then, months later, kicked out onto the street at midnight. Eighty pounds lighter, unable to walk, he died soon thereafter.

The radio cuts back to the voice—Arnold's own. His mind goes back over the week of interviews and edits, of cutting and pasting sound waves on his computer. Now, at 6:40 a.m., here is the final product. And even though Arnold has been hearing his voice on the radio for five years, he still isn't quite used to it. When he thinks of the 10 million other people listening, it feels stranger still.

Five years ago Arnold (opposite, left) was hired as a National Public Radio reporter in the Bay Area, the silicon nexus of the new world economy. He took the job—reporting on entrepreneurship in America—with a little dread. Arnold knew as much about business as most English majors.

But in those five years, he's been digging for the human side of business—the sacrifices, the passion, the courage and the insanity of these people who throw their whole lives into building something out of nothing (in Bright's case, a nonprofit). In a sense, it's been Arnold's job to report on the American Dream.





## For National Public Radio, This is Chris Arnold and Gerry Hadden

Fifteen hundred miles south and east, Gerry Hadden '89 (above, right) sits in the glass-enclosed library on top of his house. Around him spreads Mexico City, one of the largest collections of human beings on earth. Looking out, he can see the Chapultapec Castle, the nearby Parque España and the hazy hills south of the city.

For the last year, Hadden has been National Public Radio's foreign correspondent in Mexico City, reporting not only on the 20 million people around him but on major events in the region, from the U.S. border to the South American jungles and the islands stretching out to the Antilles. Covering such an expansive beat can be overwhelming, but Hadden says somehow it all works out.

An example: After just three days in Mexico City—fresh from Los Angeles—Hadden was in a hotel, still living out of his suitcase, trying to find an apartment when he got a call: he had to fly to Haiti to cover the country's congressional elections.

Hadden got off the plane in Port-au-Prince and blinked. He didn't know exactly where he was and didn't speak a word of Creole. Around him was a country deep in crisis. There had been several recent political killings. The electoral system was in chaos (especially where ballots were delivered by donkey), and for more than a year there had been no functioning government.

Hadden hit the ground running—and was hooked. "It was exhilarating," he said, "because you land and you go, 'Okay, what tools do I have? I have four days to get my first piece on the air and I don't know how to ask for a taxi. How am I going to do this?' And you know it just always works out somehow. I don't know how, but somehow in the last minute it always works out."

Within a few days, Hadden's voice was coming through radios across America, interviewing soda vendors, boys washing cars and a man who pulled two pieces of shrapnel out of his arm from when he had walked by an exploding grenade. Hadden went out into the countryside—wading through swollen rivers where jeeps couldn't go—to interview peasants who were forming cooperatives to help themselves.

Those were his first reports for NPR's international desk, and after a trial by fire Hadden came out a correspondent.



In the beginning, radio was like magic. A telegraph without poles. A telephone without wires.

In 1901, Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi sat on a cliff in Newfoundland listening to his earphone and heard a faint pip pip pip from his other machine across the Atlantic. The Morse letter “s” signaled a new era. The world was stunned by Marconi’s 1,700-mile transmission. Alexander Graham Bell refused to believe it. But within three decades science fiction had become a daily fact, and the world was glued to the radio.

When the Depression hit America, radio provided a cheap escape from reality. The popularity of Amos ‘n’ Andy, The Lone Ranger and FDR’s fireside chats soared, and the shows became fixtures of evening life.

But radio also became something more. It was on radio that FDR announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor, that Edward R. Murrow made his war dispatches from Europe and that Truman announced the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Radio became our living connection to the world.

According to some, in 1950 radio was just coming of age and was on the verge of becoming a higher art. Then, disaster hit: a hypnotic new medium, called “radiovision” by some and “television”

the listener. It was “photojournalism for the ear,” in the words of co-founder William Siemerling.

Since its first live broadcast, of the 1971 Senate Vietnam hearings, NPR has grown. Today, the \$95-million-a-year network has 490 affiliate stations, 16 million listeners each week and almost 80 reporters across the globe. In the commuting era, it has succeeded in becoming one of the most respected news agencies in the world.

So how do you get to be part of this organization—this elite corps of reporters? It’s a question Chris Arnold gets all the time. It’s one he never knows quite how to answer.

The only one Arnold can give is how he—armed only with his English degree—got to be a national business reporter personally responsible for interpreting one of the most important periods in American business history: the rise of the Internet.

“It’s been kind of nuts to watch,” he said, “because I was here right when it started, right when Netscape first happened. And you could see it build, and watch how this insane wave of irrational exuberance spread, and how everybody got caught up in it. At first it didn’t make any sense to me, or a lot of the people in the valley. A lot of the venture capitalists said, ‘I don’t know how these companies



by others, soon robbed radio of its biggest stars and most of its audience. America’s entertainment shifted from word to image; from what was being said to the person who said it. To paraphrase one critic, it went from the theater of the mind to the theater of the mindless.

To survive, radio networks began fragmenting into niche markets: news stations, talk stations, music stations, etc. By the mid-1960s, radio had lost its way.

In 1967, in response to what Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton Minow called “the vast wasteland” of television, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was formed. Lyndon Johnson (who owned a radio station) proposed a radio component, and three years later National Public Radio was born, with an eye toward revitalizing the aural medium.

Almost immediately, NPR started attracting listeners. Shows like *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition* pioneered the now-common news magazine format. According to radio historian Susan Douglas, NPR “revived the sort of eyewitness account pioneered by CBS in the late 1930s” and used ambient sounds to transport

are going to make any money,’ way back in 1996 or 1997. And by 1999 the whole world had gone crazy, and it just created a reality of its own. It was an interesting kind of hundred-year-flood to watch.”

It was an actual hundred-year-flood that first got Arnold in the door at NPR. After working at Colby’s WMHB, where (with an eye toward his résumé) he’d put together a news department, Arnold thought radio might be a good way to put his interest in writing together with his other interests, including radio and news.

So after graduation, he followed his girlfriend to San Francisco (they later broke up), and Arnold was temping two days a week at a hospital and running around with his tape recorder the rest—first for a local commercial station, then volunteering, stringing and freelancing for KQED, the San Francisco public radio station. When devastating floods hit northern California, he was sent to cover them. It was there that he almost blew his big chance.

“They sent me up there in a pickup truck,” he remembers, “and I got in there just before they closed the road, and the NPR reporters couldn’t get in. So the NPR editor started calling me on the cell



phone, saying, 'You have to do a story for *Morning Edition*.'

"I was totally young and I said, 'I can't, I have to do a story for KQED.' I said I'd do stories for them, and since I'm a younger, not-so-experienced reporter, I think the most prudent thing to do is to tell you I shouldn't do the story.' There was a pause, and the national editor kind of laughed and said, 'That's really cute, Chris, but we need a story for tomorrow morning. Three and a half minutes.' And he hung up."

As the only reporter in the flooded area, Arnold found himself filing live reports on a cell phone from a canoe on swollen rivers. He watched people get helicoptered off roofs and stand on tables in their homes while the water rose to electrical outlets. At the end of the year, he won several awards for his reports and his use of sound.

But most important, he got noticed at NPR. Six months later, when a position opened up on the national desk, Arnold applied and got it.

As a young man, Gerry Hadden also went west. After graduating from Colby with a degree in German, he traveled the world for a year, then moved to New York, where he worked in publishing because he knew he wanted to be a writer. Only he didn't know what kind.

"After three years in book publishing," said Hadden, "I had learned, I think, what I was going to learn about how to get published. And I was dying sitting behind a desk. So not knowing exactly

a Fulbright Scholarship. After four months in L.A., Hadden found himself in Mexico City, looking for a place to live.

The paths to NPR are as varied as the stories you hear on it. But one rule is always the same. "You can't just graduate from school and apply and get a job," said Arnold. "It's totally a trade. It's like being a carpenter or something. You've got to learn it, and you've got to wade in and you've got to make absolutely no money for a few years. . . . You've got to bust your ass for a few years and get through a lot of crap to get to the point where you're good enough that somebody would actually hire you. But the thing is, even after you do that, there's absolutely no guarantee you're going to get hired. There are five good people for every job."

In other words, you work hard, you get a break, and you take it.

Both Hadden and Arnold know how lucky they are, and both seem to love their work—mining the sounds and voices and stories around them and shaping these into something for us to hear. Not only that, but they seem to have fun and to love the way their work has opened their eyes.

"It's a free pass to walk into people's lives all across the country," said Arnold. "I just love it. I've always loved it. I love telling stories. Every few days, or every week, I get to go out and meet some totally



what else to do, I did a big thing. I just shook everything up and moved to the other coast and said, 'I want to be a writer. I don't know what that means exactly, but I can't stay in this inertia that I'm in.'"

For about a year, Hadden bummed around Seattle, doing temp work, writing fiction (which appeared in *Story* and *Icarus* magazines) and bragging to his New York friends that he liked to work three weeks and take the fourth one off. But soon a new angst settled in.

"After about a year, I realized that I was more ambitious than I had thought, and I started to feel antsy, intellectually. Then I just stumbled into an internship at the local NPR station. And the first day I walked in the door, I thought, 'I'm going to do everything in my power to never leave this world.' Because it really felt like the first job in my life that I liked, besides being a taxi driver." And aside from two months he took off to write the text for *Home Tree Home*, a book about how to build treehouses, he's never left that world.

Hadden's internship evolved into some "cut and copy" work (writing the news), then reporting. And then he got called to fill in for Mandalit Del Barco, who left her post in Los Angeles for

new person and ask them any question I want about their life and then come back and turn that into a story for other people to hear. It's like throwing people's personal stories out there on the air for other people to learn from and think about."

Hadden agrees. "I feel like it's the greatest, most creative niche to have landed in," he said. "You can make a people or a country or place come to life for somebody in a way that print and TV can't. I think TV is indispensable on certain levels. But in general, I think radio can touch people on a deeper level." And despite the stress of having such a huge area to cover, Hadden still wouldn't trade his half-continent beat for a desk job. The expanse for which he is responsible is even a blessing.

"Because the region is so huge," he said, "it frees me up to cover the most important stories or the most interesting stories or to really poke around and try to show the face of a country or culture that people might not be used to hearing about. And finally, when I start to get overwhelmed, I remind myself that I get paid to travel and be curious and tell stories. It's the greatest job in the world."