



## Bartels

From Page 1

Twitter,” Bartels said in an interview with the Plain Talk. “Rachel Maddow tweeted out, the *Washington Post* tweeted it out. I have to say I am still overwhelmed by the response.”

Yet Bartels said it still isn't something she is comfortable with.

“I know me; I am not someone who looks forward,” she said. “I am sure I will be saying, ‘What have I done? What have I done?’”

As she transitions into her new position as communications director for the Colorado Secretary of State, a job she will begin on August 10, Bartels said reflecting on her career and the impact it has had is “gratifying.”

“The beginning was I worked for the *Plain Talk* one summer,” she said. “I feel such a connection to the *Plain Talk* because, first of all, the *Plain Talk* printed the Vermillion High School paper. I would drive Mrs. Erickson, she was our journalism teacher, she had a Road Runner so I would honk the whole way there, even though there was no reason too. I would go there and then I interned the summer of '79. I loved it. Because it was the building that was down town, sometimes we would go in late at night and climb up into the rafters and look at all the old imprints. I wish I had taken it all, because who knows what they did with it.”

Bartels said she subscribed to the *Plain Talk* for what felt like a thousand years, because it offered such a connection.

Yet even before high school she was influenced by the news.

“I think I just loved to read,” she said. “We lived out in the country and we got our newspaper –we got the *Sioux City Journal* growing up because my mom was from South Sioux and my dad was from Hubbard, Nebraska. The *Argus Leader* at that time was from the 1950's, then Gannet bought it and did modern layout and it was just amazing. I think it was the Watergate era, too. I was very influenced by that. I was a huge Nixon supporter. I still have the *Sioux City Journal* that Mary Merrigan gave me and she wrote, ‘Our condolences,’ when Nixon resigned, because I was such a Nixon fan up until then.”

That love of the news led her to be editor of both her high school and college papers.

“I went to two colleges,” she said. “I went to Cottey College in Nevada, Missouri because Judi Chaney who lived in Vermillion and I babysat for her, had gone there. I went to USD only (one summer) because I had flunked math – I had a fun freshman year – and had to take two classes to be able to graduate.”

She said when you grow up in Vermillion USD is your life.

“I have brothers and sisters that graduated from here. My mom worked at the “B” school,” she re-

flected. “My dad listened to Coyote sports his entire life. In fact, he died in March, and when he was in the hospital one of the nurses said her brother had used to play for USD, my dad new every stat about him. The university is such a big part of your life if you are from Vermillion. Then I transferred to Northern Arizona University because Cottey is a two year school. I was actually an education major, the classes I was just going insane, so I switched to my minor which was journalism. Here I am.”

Her first job was Gallup, New Mexico.

“My second job was the *Albuquerque Tribune* where I was the city columnist,” she said. “We worked on a huge drunken driving project that won so many awards – it was amazing. Then I went to Denver to work for the *Rocky Mountain News*, which was like a sister paper. When the *Rocky* closed like six weeks shy of its hundredth birthday in 2009, I was one of the people picked up by the *Denver Post*. I probably would still be working for them except they offered buyouts. At first I was like, ‘Of course I am not going to take it. Who would hire me?’ It turns out, a lot of people wanted to hire me, which surprised me. I ended up choosing the Secretary of State's office.”

The reactions to the news of her retirement were overwhelming for Bartels.

“One person wrote, ‘Lynn Bartels going to work for a state agency is like a five-star chef going to make pies at the Village Inn,’” she said. “Everyone is questioning why I would make this choice. But, I really like the boss. He asked me twice if I was going to apply for this job. I was like, ‘No, I am not going to apply for this job.’ But I really liked everybody in the job interview – it's a state job. My family played a huge influence on me. They really were worried about the hours I was working and they just said try it. If you don't like it go back to something else. Trust me election in this day and age – it will be a different pace, but I will still be busy.”

“If you go out on Facebook and look the comments are amazing,” Bartels added. “On some of the comments there have been like 100 replies and 900 likes.”

“She inspired me. She made me better.”

“Biggest retirement since John Elway.”

“Great day for Lynn, sad day for journalism,” Rachel Maddow.

“One of the people I asked what should I do, said, ‘Do what makes you happy, you have nothing more to prove in Journalism,’” said Bartels. “The last day at work was Friday, because I already had a previously scheduled vacation. I said remember that scene in ‘Kramer vs. Kramer’ where Billy and Dustin Hoffman are making breakfast. ‘If I don't like it can I come home?’ the little boy tearfully asked? That is how I feel this morning.”

While the *Post* knew they were losing a good employee, Bartels said they really didn't have a choice in the

matter.

“It was very hard for them, I did a lot more than the work of one person,” she said. “I was very sourced and broke a lot of stories. One of the long-time employees of the *Post* said, ‘You have given the paper national stature.’ And I had only been there six years since the ‘*Rocky*’ closed. My immediate boss was shocked, my big boss was heartbroken. They didn't really have a choice. The new owners were like you need to make this much of a profit, so offer buyouts. I was eligible because of age, I am 58. I would still be working at the *Post* if that had never happened. Like I said you just mentioned that you were eligible for the buyout and somebody calls. It was very gratifying because I had always said, ‘Who will hire me?’ It turns out a lot of people will hire me.”

She added when she went into sign the paper work she burst into tears, it was very hard.

“My last official payroll day was Tuesday and I retired two days short of a 35 year career,” Bartels said. “I was telling someone when I was trying to decide what to do, I cried as hard as the day my dad died on March 14. It is so who I am, just the DNA. My sister worked at a bank for a while and they just worked for the 10 a.m. break and whatnot. I just never wanted a job where I lived for the break and journalism is not like that at all.”

When reflecting on the stories that have been most memorable, Bartels said what was memorable for her were maybe not the biggest stories, but the stories about everyday life and people.

“Major stories I have covered include the Columbine High School shootings, the Oklahoma Bombing trials, Jon Bennet Ramsey,” she said. “I have stories that other people recognize, but for me it is sometimes just the little personal stories that resonate the most.”

“There had been a series of murders of homeless

people and they called me up and said they wanted me to do a series on who these people were. I was like, ‘They are homeless how am I going to know who they were.’ Turns out they had family and friends who cared deeply about them. Some of them had addictions and some mental health issues and for the most part liked living on the streets. When that story appeared – I happened to be working the Sunday that it came out – and this woman called me and she was just crying because one of the guys in there had camped outside their building and she had never thought of him as a person until she read the story. Just things like that are much more. When people send you a note and say you got him and you captured his spirit.

There are the big stories, but sometimes it is the little subtle ones that are.”

Bartels said she has never left Vermillion behind.

“From growing up in a small town, I will give you an example (of how it influenced me,) she said. “It was the Texas Seven, they had escaped from prison and were holed up in Colorado and they caught them. So, I was covering the Legislature but they sent me down to try to get an interview or something. I struck out. Everybody had already been down there for like a day and I didn't think I was going to be able to get anything. So, we get down there and they say the prisoners aren't talking and they are not doing interviews. I called my boss and said I told you I wasn't going to get anything. Then I went back to my hotel room and my boss calls and said the *Dallas Morning News* has an interview with one of these guys.”

“So, being from a small town, I got into the phone book and looked up the sheriff's home phone number and said, ‘Sherriff, I am in trouble here because they said they weren't doing interviews.’ So, he calls back and says you can drive up to the jail. I told him I don't drive at night, they are going to have to call me here. Nobody could believe I was doing that. But that is the small town. The other thing is there was a really bizarre homicide, incredibly bizarre. It was a police officer's son, he had shot this woman and paralyzed another woman. So, we are trying to find out information about him and we looked at the records and realized he had been married before. The girl was from Wisconsin. So I called the school. Of course the secretary was her aunt or something. I was also getting details because I would say to somebody, ‘Do you have your 20th year reunion information?’ All of that was because I grew up in a small town.”

She noted when she said she was retiring, people on the left and on the right were equally distraught.

“I was proud of that,” said Bartels. “People make fun of me because I wrote a lot of stories about the one armed dispatcher and all the little stories. Someone told me it wasn't news when the government does its job, its news when the government doesn't do its job. I said, ‘I will never be that kind of reporter.’ Government doing its job is news and if it something happens you are more apt to get stories because of it. The daily things people do, the everyday things, is what is news.”

“Reality is when you cover government you are going to cover government screwing up, because people in government are human. Humans make mistakes. Sadly, a lot of theirs get put on the front page. But I am not going to go

## PANCAKE FOR A CAUSE

SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Members of the Vermillion Lions Club in conjunction with the W.H. Over Museum fed hundreds of travelers at the I-29 rest stop last weekend, many of which were headed to the 75th Annual Sturgis Bike Rally. Richard Stensaas participated as a greeter, making visitors feel welcome and offering a tasty breakfast of pancakes, sausage, coffee and juice.

“I usually try to get them over, shake their hands and talk to them,” Stensaas said. “They love South Dakota with the wide open area.”

Stensaas met people from Illinois, Ohio, Mississippi, Kentucky, Iowa, California, Washington, Nebraska and Canada. There were even visitors from Norway. The rest stop had about 1,100 guests each day during the pancake feed according to Maxine Johnson, director of the W.H. Over Museum. About half of the visitors ate. According to Johnson the rest stop staff was incredibly helpful and accommodating.

looking for how government screws up, if it happens it happens. I think in the course of writing about everyday lives – I did a lot of going out with people. I rode with the cops, I rode with the garbage trucks, I rode with the candidates – you learn more.”

She reflected on a story recently with the two US Senators from Colorado.

“Everyplace we went people commented that they couldn't believe they were riding together,” Bartels said. “One is a Democrat and one is a Republican. I was on the bus with them all day. Another reporter asked why I didn't just drive to the starting point in Fort Morgan. It was like a meeting in a restaurant, boy I am going to get a lot of news out of that. I did the whole thing all day; I just love that kind of experience. The interesting thing was there was that whole trade thing blowing up at that time, so the Democratic Senator kept taking phone calls from the White House and other senators all day.”

While Bartels said many have called her a mentor, she is also proud that the people who she has covered consider her a trusted friend.

“It is weird because people would always comment that I had so many sources,” she said. “Then someone would comment but that is because she wasn't hard on them. But, when I needed to be tough I am. We had a press conference with the Governor – I am very good friends with the Governor – someone asked him a question and he went back and forth. Finally, I said, ‘Answer. The. Question.’ People were shocked but when push comes to shove I will do that.”

She said part of her success was based on the fact she went to tons of events on the weekends on her own time and then wrote about them on the Posts award winning blog.

“People would say they didn't want to go out and cover things on the weekend, this thing or that thing,” Bartels said. “One of the last things I wrote about was this guy who was a huge aids activist and he died. I went to the memorial service and someone asked if I was covering it for the *Post* and I was like, ‘No, I am here for the blog. I need to do a follow up.’ His family sent me the nicest note saying thank you for telling people who he really was.”

Her influence was national, not just regional, evidenced by many national television guest appearances and access to leaders from around the country.

“My dad was so proud because when they had Obama's first debate in Denver I went up to Sen. John Thune and said, ‘Hey senator, I am Lynn Bartels, I am Dick Wadham's really good friend,’”

she recalled. Dick was his campaign manager. Dad saw him at the Dakota Dome and said Sen. Thune I understand you met my daughter. Sen. Thune asked, ‘Who is your daughter?’ When my dad said Lynn Bartels, Sen. Thune said ‘She's awesome.’ I got home and there were like six messages from my dad, they were so proud. He emailed me when dad got sick and said if you need anything let me know.”

Her parents, Fritz and Mary Bartels, have lived in Clay County since 1956.

“I was born in the Vermillion hospital here and am a proud graduate of Vermillion High School class of 1975. Our reunion is this weekend,” she said. “I am most looking forward to just seeing people. I was back for our 10th reunion and haven't been back for any of the others.”

“When I was a columnist I wrote about one of the high school reunions and it was weird because someone stopped in Albuquerque because his car had broken down and he was getting it fixed. We were having lunch and he said only three of the big names didn't show up: our homecoming king, homecoming queen and me. I never felt that way about myself in high school. So, I wrote this column about high school and that column appeared all across the country. I would hear from people. People always kind of laughed about the Vermillion stories. Let's just say that in a lot of my columns there was a huge flavor of Vermillion in them.”

While she never seriously thought about moving back to South Dakota, she said she was proud of the work the papers, particularly the *Argus Leader* have done when under the leadership of Randal Beck.

“So, I guess briefly I may have thought about coming back,” she said. “I was very proud of the *Argus Leader* when it was winning all those awards. I think my mom told them in 2012 there had been some criticism of the paper and that all the men were getting the coverage. So, they asked readers who the most influential women in the state of Colorado were and I was picked the fifth most influential woman.”

Bartels said that she has covered politics for a long time, so it will be familiar, but it is a whole different world than reporting. A challenge she will face head on.

No matter what, she is amazed at the outpouring from people she has touched with her reporting career.

“As I read all of these comments on Facebook, which are overwhelming, I feel like George Bailey from ‘It's a Wonderful Life,’ she said. “I feel like wow, you really have made a difference and touched people. That's incredibly gratifying.”

Now Accepting New Clientele

## Touching Lives Caregiver, LLC

“Live Life To the Fullest”

**Ana Nesselhuf**, Owner  
Phone: 605.202.0987  
ana@TouchingLivesCaregiver.com  
www.TouchingLivesCaregiver.com

Services Provided: Personal Care | Transitional/Respite Care  
Companionship, Medication Reminders | Appointment  
Accompaniment | Meal Preparation, Team Services Available  
24/7 | Long/Short Term Care | Activities of Daily Living



## TECTA AMERICA®

DAKOTAS  
TARGET ROOFING/GREENBERG ROOFING

Tecta America is the nation's premier commercial roofing contractor with operations located from coast to coast. We are hiring for the following positions in our Bismarck, Grand Forks, Minot, Fargo offices:

- Roofer
- Service Foreman
- Production Foreman
- Sheet Metal Helper
- Sheet Metal Foreman

Previous roofing experience and valid driver's license preferred. Compensation package including retention bonus. Retention bonus \$500 at 1,000 hours and another \$500 at 2,000 hours. CDL Bonus, travel incentive, performance bonus and much more. Year round work available. Please apply by emailing jbreth@tectamerica.com

EOE/AA



## Knutson

FAMILY DENTISTRY

Dental Excellence for Children & Adults



### 605-624-6291

Dr. Richard Knutson, D.D.S. • Dr. Matthew Knutson, D.D.S.

www.KnutsonFamilyDentistry.com