

ALUMNI PROFILE

Jim Heller, in the main square in Kiev, Ukraine



Where has life taken you since you left WSDP and PCEP?

I graduated in 1983 and joined the Army, where I spent nearly three years in the newsroom of the American Forces Korea Network in Seoul (with fellow WSDP-er Steve Johnston). After leaving the Army, I went to the University of Michigan, where I worked for student stations WCBN/WJXX while getting a B.A. and an M.A. from Michigan's Center for Chinese Studies. After that, I spent four years in China: one on a fellowship at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center and three as a research assistant at the U.S. Consulate in Shenyang, where I met my wife Lisa (a diplomat who hails from Pittsburgh). While in China, I also had the good fortune to get to know CNN's China guru, Mike Chinoy, and with his assistance I got a job as a news writer/producer in CNN's Washington bureau, working on what at that time was CNN's flagship international news program, Worldview, with Bernie Shaw and Judy Woodruff. After a few great years at CNN, the State Department made me an offer that was too good to turn down: I signed on as a Foreign Service Officer, meshing my journalism skills and interest in international politics with the ability to move together with my wife from assignment to assignment. We've done tours of duty in Beijing and Washington, and are currently posted in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. Brrrr.



JIM HELLER

SALEM CLASS OF 1983

"If you love it, pursue it. The notion that you 'can't earn a living in the news business' is nonsense."

What do you enjoy doing your spare time?

I have two little kids, so I spend my spare time with them. They love Kiev's parks, and I think we've visited every playground in the city. Probably every ice cream stand, too.

What is your favorite memory of your time at WSDP?

The people.

Why was being involved with WSDP important for you?

I was doubly blessed: I worked under the leadership of people who cared deeply about the station and its students, the late Jeff Cardinal, Andy Melin and the venerable John Seidelman. And I worked with a critical mass of incredibly talented and witty friends who have turned their WSDP

experience into successful careers not only in the news business, but in fields like law, advertising, and academia.

What advice would you give to current staff members?

First: don't let anybody talk you out of pursuing a career in broadcast journalism. If you love it, pursue it. The notion that you "can't earn a living in the news business" is nonsense; you can make a good living, particularly when you get to the network level, and have a lot of fun. Plus, I'm living proof of the truism that journalism skills, particularly good writing skills, mesh well with a variety of professions, be it advertising, law — or diplomacy. Second: journalism is an honorable profession. I can tell you from personal experience that tyrants passionately hate journalists because journalists tell the truth. I've covered the human rights beat in China and here in Ukraine, and I assure you that journalists drive the KGB-types absolutely bananas. Stoking the fire of Liberty and fighting tyranny can at times be dangerous, but it's not a bad way to spend a career. Finally, the hard part: you need to get as much education as you can and, if you want to work internationally, get proficient in Chinese, Russian and/or Arabic. Get cracking now, folks, because language acquisition is a young person's game.