

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the  
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Interviewer: Mr. Neuharth's skyrocketing career took him from humble beginnings in Eureka, South Dakota to the position of president and chief executive of the Gannett Corporation, chairman of its foundation, and bestselling author.

Al Neuharth: I [00:00:30] had written six books before I wrote the *Confessions of an S.O.B.*, so I've authored seven books, I say facetiously I hope not. Publishers are always after you if you have a bestseller. They're always after you to write again. I am not working on a book at this time, but I'm a reporter night and day wherever I go and I take notes and keep track of things. And who knows? I may be foolish enough to write another one, one of these years.

Interviewer: This autobiography, a symbol of [00:01:00] Mr. Neuharth's success, is a valued treasure of most everyone's library. Today as chairman of The Freedom Forum, Mr. Neuharth oversees one of the largest private organizations instrumental in the advancement of free press and free speech around the world. Born on March 24, 1924, to the recently widowed Christina Neuharth, Mr. Neuharth lived the ultimate Cinderella fantasy.

Al Neuharth: Country kid from South Dakota who was lucky enough to get a very good education in a small town [00:01:30] through grade school and high school. I was in an environment where I was able to work on the side, so I learned pretty good work ethic as a kid. And my real growing up process was during World War II. I think that took the boy out of the country and the country out of the boy.

Interviewer: His journalistic career began after he moved to Alpena, South Dakota, where he obtained his first job [00:02:00] delivering newspapers.

Al Neuharth: But I always worked. I worked side jobs by the time I was 13, from delivering papers to being a butcher boy to being a soda jerk in the drugstore. So, I combined bringing a little money to the table for our family with my school activities.

Interviewer: After the war, Mr. Neuharth graduated from the University of South Dakota. Mr. Neuharth joined Gannett as general manager of the Rochester based paper and continually [00:02:30] moved up the corporate ladder until he became the chief executive in 1973.

Al Neuharth: So I wanted to do more and be more. And I loved reporting. The job I like better than any other was being city editor of the *Miami Herald*. That's the action center of a newspaper. But on the other hand, you're limited to handling the local news and I wanted to be in the big picture. To do that, I had to branch out of the newsroom and into the total operation. I never left the newsroom. [00:03:00] And even when I was president of the Gannett Company, I could roll up my sleeves and sit down at the typewriter and write a headline as fast and I think about as good as anybody else.

Interviewer: In the process, he started or acquired several local newspapers, such as the *Florida Today* and he founded the first national newspaper in 1982, the *USA Today*, proving once again according to Mr. Neuharth "If they tell you it can't be done, chances are you've got a winner." Mr. Neuharth has [00:03:30] been the recipient of countless awards, such as the Horatio Alger Award on which he comments ...

Al Neuharth: That came reasonably early in my career, I think, when I was in my late 40s and was the first really national award that I got and meant a lot to me, and it still does. It's a fine organization that still tries to encourage young people to believe that good hard work, applying yourself [00:04:00] can lead to success. It's really ... Horatio Alger did what everybody at Junior Achievement is doing. Deciding to set some targets and work at achieving them.

Interviewer: When asked which achievement gave him the greatest satisfaction, he responded ...

Al Neuharth: There are single achievements and then there is the cumulative effect of what you do when you've been at something for 50 years as I have. I think the single biggest achievement probably is the fact that we were able to launch a national newspaper, *USA* [00:04:30] *Today*, and be 10-years-old this fall and it seems to be working.

Interviewer: When asked why Brevard County holds such a particular attraction, he responded ...

Al Neuharth: I looked forward to being a resident of the Space Coast of Florida, as close to the Space Center as possible because in addition to having sand in my shoes. I'm a space nut or a very strong advocate of our space program. And so after we started *Florida Today* in 1966, I began looking for the right property to put together [00:05:00] to develop into a home. I think it's the garden spot of America or the universe, I don't mean my place, but I mean the Space Coast. It has everything in terms of the natural attractions that one could look for and it has a wonderful microcosm of America in the people that live here, I believe. [00:05:30] So, I love everything about it.