

By Lou Cannon

## WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

My children. I have three sons and a daughter, all pursuing different paths and doing well, and the added blessings of six grandchildren and a great-grandchild. Kelly, my eldest son's older daughter, teaches 4-year-olds in Washington, D.C., and has worked in an orphanage in Romania and taught children in Ghana. Tiffany, my daughter's oldest and a mother, spent a year in the Army in Iraq. I'm prouder of their accomplishments than of anything I've done.

Professionally, I'm proud — and thankful — that I've been able to do interesting work at which I became reasonably good. As a boy growing up in Reno I dreamed of going around the world and writing about the people in it but never imagined that I would one day walk alongside President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Red Square at a summit that presaged the end of the Cold War. I also dreamed of becoming a published writer but struggled with my writing for many years. I was 36 when my first book was published. I've now written eight, including five about Ronald Reagan. *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, published in 1992 and updated eight years later, is often cited as an authoritative biography; it's still selling. My best non-Reagan book, which I completed with the help of my wife, Mary, is *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD*, the story of the 1992 case that absorbed the nation. It was a commercial failure, but a book I needed to write.

I won many awards during my 26 years at *The Washington Post*, but I'm particularly proud of two: the Aldo Beckman award for excellence in presidential coverage, and the first Gerald R. Ford Prize (1988) for Distinguished Reporting on the Nixon, Ford,



Photo by Deidre Pike

*Longtime Washington Post reporter and columnist Lou Cannon, widely regarded as the biographer of Ronald Reagan, was born in New York City but moved to Reno with his parents when he was 3. In 1950, near the start of the Korean War, he enrolled at the University of Nevada. Two years later he transferred to San Francisco State University and in so doing lost a half-unit of credits. This eventually cost him his exemption from the military draft. When he emerged from the military, he had started a family and never went back to school — at least not as a student. In 1995 he was Raznick Distinguished Lecturer in the University of California, Santa Barbara's history department, and in 1996 he was Freedom Forum journalist in residence at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California. He and his wife, Mary, now live in Summerland, near Santa Barbara. He is collaborating with his eldest son, Carl, a prize-winning White House correspondent for National Journal, on a book exploring the long-range impact of Reagan policies and the way they have been implemented in George W. Bush's presidency. The working title: Reagan's Disciple.*

and Reagan presidencies. I'm also proud I walked away from daily journalism in 1998, when I was 65, and became a freelancer.

## WHAT DO YOU REGRET?

Regrets are a waste of time unless you take from them some lesson that enhances your understanding of life and of your own imperfections. I have few regrets and most of those are personal. I regret that my children

and now some of my grandchildren are so widely scattered across the country that I don't see them as often as I'd like.

Professionally, my biggest regret is that I didn't sound a louder alarm during the trial of the Los Angeles police officers accused of the beating of Rodney King. I could see from the skeptical reactions of jurors to some of the evidence that the officers might be acquitted and wrote a cautious story beforehand that hinted at the possibility. I wish I'd been less cautious because the acquittals led to riots in which 54 people died and a large swath of South Los Angeles was destroyed. I say that even though I know a story in a faraway newspaper wouldn't have made much difference since the police and civilian leadership of Los Angeles were unprepared for these preventable riots.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A NEW COLLEGE GRADUATE?

Find a purpose in life that's bigger than you are. Become involved in your community. Care about others. Work hard. Listen. Have a sense of history but don't look back in your own life. Realize that you're on earth to accomplish something. Follow your dreams. Shakespeare had it right: "To thine own self be true. . . [and] thou canst not then be false to any man."

If the graduate seeks to be a journalist, I'd add this advice: Don't be dazzled by the Internet or other technologies that open new possibilities for the media. Exciting as these technologies may be, they are no substitute for the traditional journalistic verities of curiosity, open-mindedness, skepticism and fairness.

**WHAT I'VE DONE WITH MY LIFE** asks an alum who has been out of school for a while to answer the three questions above. Email your submission to [silverblue@unr.edu](mailto:silverblue@unr.edu), or send it via regular mail to: *Nevada Silver & Blue*, University of Nevada, Reno, Mail Stop 108, Reno, NV 89557-0108. Include a phone number. Don't exceed 650 words. Submissions may be posted at [www.unr.edu/nevadasilverandblue](http://www.unr.edu/nevadasilverandblue).