

Managing Chaos: Adventures in Alternative Media.

Greg Guma

An eye-witness account that explores the unique, tumultuous history of Pacifica radio and alternative media in America.

By [Greg Guma](#)

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After an eclectic career, Greg Guma discusses the evolution of radio and television, the impacts of concentrated media ownership, the rise of the alternative press, his own work in Vermont — before and during a progressive revolution that changed the state's power structure, and decades later, how he managed the original listener-supported radio network.

Weaving together an intimate chronicle of what he saw as Pacifica Radio's first post-revolution CEO and episodes from his earlier life as a reporter, editor and activist, Guma explores the challenges of maintaining democratic institutions in a culture of distrust and polarization, of striking the delicate balance between truth and advocacy, observation and participation, and of managing conflicts with persuasion instead of force.

Managing Chaos is a media saga, a personal story, and a cautionary tale.

...a skilled writer who has immersed himself in Vermont life and politics for decades. —
Sasha Abramsky

...the first executive in Pacifica who has been willing, and able, to share his experiences.... They ought to be required reading for all PNB and LSB members.
— Nalini Lasiewicz

Excerpts from the Book

"The deeper I looked the more convoluted and intractable the problems appeared: Charges and counter-charges of secrecy, waste, racism, sexism, harassment and violence, turf battles over local fiefdoms, manipulation, and alleged fraud. It seemed like a fratricidal war with no end in sight.

"It reminded me of how easily reality can be blurred by misinformation. That July, Jeff Ruch, the director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, had issued a relevant assessment of a much larger and even more dysfunctional organization. 'The federal government,' he concluded, 'is suffering from a severe disinformation syndrome.'

"Could this be what afflicted Pacifica? Spurious theories presented as facts, information massaged to promote a specific spin, cherry-picked evidence. Whether intentional or not, Pacifica's convoluted politics and history seemed to have created, as Bob Woodward put it in his book that summer about Watergate source Deep Throat, "an entire world of doubt."

"Who could unravel such a mess, no less get the larger community to look beyond its debilitating bitterness and distrust? Probably not a middle-aged activist editor from one of the smallest, whitest states in the country...."



".... The chance to work at Pacifica radio came my way by accident. More than a decade earlier I'd met an activist librarian on a plane by striking up a conversation about Z, a left-wing magazine she was reading. Even before 9/11, you rarely saw people on airplanes engrossed in "alternative" publications.

"At the time I was editing *Toward Freedom*, a small but respected magazine that had

covered international affairs from a “progressive perspective” since the early 1950s. We hit it off, and the librarian provided an invaluable stream of news, ideas and leads for articles over the next decade. She was also a loyal yet disgruntled listener to a Pacifica station, and when the top job became available, she let me know.

“I had some of the qualifications, starting with management and development experience. In my twenties, I worked with schools and anti-poverty groups developing paraprofessional training programs. In my thirties, I edited Vermont’s groundbreaking alternative weekly, the *Vanguard Press*, and helped usher in a progressive political era. I led the revival of *Toward Freedom* and, for more than a decade, edited and wrote on global politics. I also launched and ran bookstores in Burlington and Santa Monica, CA, and coordinated progressive organizations that worked on peace, justice, and immigration issues in Vermont and New Mexico. Just the year before, I had co-founded a new statewide weekly, *Vermont Guardian*, with local investors. So, there was all of that.

“Still, it didn’t feel right to me at first...”

Look for *Managing Chaos: Adventures in Alternative Media* this summer. Interested in writing a preview? Request review copy at Mavmediavt@gmail.com

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