

# Meet the Absolutely Not Famous Jack Gray '02

Jack Gray '02

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**UNH Today** recently had the pleasure of talking with alum Jack Gray '02 during the whirlwind of his first book tour for *Pigeon in a Crosswalk: Tales of Anxiety and Accidental Glamour*, a collection of humorous essays. He talked to us about his time at UNH, his job as a primetime producer, and the book. Keep reading. There's whoopie pies and good advice for job seekers.

**Jack Gray:** I'm a Massachusetts native and did my first year of college at Emerson College in Boston. It was a great experience but I decided to transfer to a more conventional campus setting. My mom is a UNH alum so I was familiar with the university and thought it would be a good fit for me.

**Tell us what you were involved with while at UNH.**

**JG:** WUNH radio. I delivered an evening news bulletin and hosted a weekly current events talk show called The Gray Area. Get it? My last name is Gray. OK, moving on. I was also involved with eating a lot of whoopie pies that were sold in the MUB. And those great smoothies at the Coffee Office. I think that's what it was called. I just remember smoothies and whoopie pies. Oh, the days when you could eat like that and not gain weight. Enjoy them while they last. I also worked part-time as a producer and reporter at NHPTV's *New Hampshire Outlook*. That was a terrific experience. Great people – I loved it there.

**Who was your favorite professor?**

**JG:** The late Sally Jacoby in the communication department. She was so fascinating – a true renaissance woman. She'd lived in the Middle East for a while and we had many long discussions in her office about her time there and the political climate in the region. She also had experience in theater and flamenco dancing. Sally was smart, funny, and just a delight to be around. I miss her very much.

**Any particular thing or story you want to share about your time at UNH?**

**JG:** You mean besides all the parking tickets? No. Well, the Dairy Bar. That's almost worth a parking ticket.

**What did you do after leaving UNH?**

**JG:** I had an internship with WCVB-TV (ABC/Channel 5 – Boston) during one of my college summers. I "ripped scripts," as we called it in those days, for legendary anchors Chet Curtis and Natalie Jacobson (UNH '65). By the time I graduated, Chet had moved to NECN (New England Cable News). He and fellow NECN anchor (and UNH alum) Mike Nikitas generously gave me some advice about pursuing a job there. I got a freelance, part-time production assistant job, which eventually turned into a full-time staff position. I went on to be promoted to newscast producer, assigned to various programs including the noon and 4 p.m. newscasts, as well as *Wired* with Jim Braude and *The Chet Curtis Report*.

**How did you get your job at CNN?**

**JG:** The old-fashioned way. I applied through their website. After a couple months I'd kind of given up that anyone would see my resume, but, turns out, they did.

**What advice do you have for journalism students interested in a career like yours?**

**JG:** Do as many internships as you can. Do the grunt work. Sort scripts, log file tape – it's not fun, but someone has to do that stuff. And, this may sound like a no-brainer, but apply for the jobs. No one can hire you if you don't apply. Apply, apply, apply. Get your resume out there into the application system. It worked for me. I didn't know anyone at CNN.

***What is a typical day like for you as a producer for Anderson Cooper, 360?***

**JG:** We have a staff conference call in the morning during which we discuss various story options for that night's program. I get into the newsroom in the early afternoon and see what segment(s) I've been assigned by senior staff. Pre-interviews, research, looking for video elements, keeping an eye on breaking news stories, pitching possible questions, story and guest pitches, logistical challenges – all fill out the rest of my day until we go on the air live at 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

***Have you always been funny? What is it like being compared to David Sedaris?***

**JG:** Hmm...I guess so. But, I've definitely come into my own voice more as I've gotten older and more comfortable. The only person who has compared me to David Sedaris is Anderson Cooper, which was very kind of him. But David Sedaris is a genius. I am just someone who spends my free time at the Olive Garden texting friends pictures of my food. And, yes, I've been to the Olive Garden in Newington. Many times. With my grandmother. Who orders martinis. At 11:30 a.m. At the Olive Garden.

***What does it mean to you to have a million plus followers on Twitter?***

**JG:** I'm pretty sure the vast majority of my followers are overseas spammers. I've said before, I think like three people actually care about what I tweet, and even that number might be a bit high.

***Do you think you're famous? How did you meet/become friends with so many famous people?? Who is your favorite? Why?***

**JG:** I am absolutely not famous. I'm a cable news producer who happens to have a book out. That's it. I happen to have some friends who are very famous. I think they like to have me around so they appear slimmer by comparison. As I've said before, the only things I've ever heard from the paparazzi are "Hey you, can you please get out of the way?" and "Hey you, your elbow is still in the shot."

***Tell us a little bit about the book. Will you write a second one?***

**JG:** It's a collection of first-person essays about my career in TV news, my family, some celebrity encounters and adventures, and my dog, Sammy. The goal is to give readers some laughs. And, yes, I'd love to write a second one. We'll see how this one does.

***The book hits on some really personal – and tough – topics. Talk about sharing those...was it a hard decision? Any regrets?***

**JG:** Nope. I tried to write everything with a humorous take. Even with the tough stuff – battling depression, coming out – I found stuff to laugh about. And I think that's important.

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