John Harris stumbled into journalism during his freshman year at Carleton College. A friend worked for the student newspaper and asked him to write a couple of articles. He did, and the effect was instantaneous. Suddenly, he was certain what he wanted to do in life.

Harris had always been fascinated by Washington and politics, and he immediately had his sights on The Washington Post. As it turned out, he graduated from Carleton on a Saturday in June of 1985 and started as a summer intern on a Monday. At the end of the summer, editors asked him to hang around a while longer.

That while ended up being more than 21 years. At the Post, Harris covered local politics, state politics in Virginia and national politics. From 1995 to 2001, he covered the Clinton White House. Later, he expanded on that reporting in a history of Bill Clinton’s presidency, The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House. He is also co-author, with his friend Mark Halperin of ABC News, of a book on presidential politics, The Way to Win: Taking the White House in 2008.

After 20 years as a reporter, Harris became drawn to editing. In part, this was just a sense that he had been around the track plenty of times and was ready for something different. Even more, however, it was a conviction that, at a time when journalism is undergoing wrenching upheavals, everyone who cares about the profession should be involved in answering the question, “What’s next?” Becoming an editor was a way to be more immersed in those conversations about the future – about how to use the Web more creatively, about how to sustain serious journalism at a time of diverse threats.

His brief editing career led Harris and Jim VandeHei – who worked with him at the Post and is his partner at The Politico – to have blue-sky conversations about what they would do if they ever had the chance to start a publication about politics from the ground up. Those conversations were mostly a way of passing the time. Then, in the fall of 2006, they became a lot more serious. Robert Allbritton made clear that his notions about the future of journalism were very much in sympathy with those of Harris and VandeHei. Allbritton offered them the chance to start something from scratch, and they took it.

That is how Harris wound up at The Politico (the print newspaper in Washington) and Politico.com (the way to reach a much larger audience around the country). Harris and VandeHei assembled a team of reporters and editors who wake up each day looking for fresh ways to attack the best political stories in and around Capitol Hill. Along the way, they hope to add to the conversation about what’s next for journalism. And they are determined to have fun while doing it – something that is in lamentably short supply in newsrooms these days.