

grassroots editor



*A journal
for newspeople*

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Edith Boys Enos: ISWNE's oldest and longest member

By Don Brod

Edith Boys Enos was one of 13 weekly newspaper editors from around the country, and the only woman, who gathered around H.R. Long at Southern Illinois University in 1955 for the first conference of what was to become the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.

She was 50 years old then and not even halfway into her life's journey. Born into a newspaper family in Plymouth, Indiana, on April 26, 1905, she can look back on careers in dance and teaching at major universities, travel in Europe when Hitler was on the rise, starting a family, and finally becoming the newspaper editor — and perhaps the guiding light — of Mishawaka, Indiana.

Edith does her "looking back" now from her rustic house that Amish artisans built for her in the woods outside her hometown of Plymouth. Sturdy oak posts and rafters are held together by wooden pegs, and the field stones in the fireplace were carried in by family members and by Edith herself. (She was in her 70s then.)

Her parents owned the daily *Pilot-News* in Plymouth, and three of her four siblings went into the newspaper business, but Edith had other plans. She enrolled in the dance program in the physical education department at the University of Wisconsin. When she left Madison with her Bachelor of Science degree, she was hired to teach dance at the University of Texas. After three years in Austin, she went to the University of California-Berkeley for two more years of teaching.

Then she began to feel the need for change. "I didn't want to get in a rut," she said. "I had seen women wake up at 55, still single, no family, and realize they had been stuck in their profession." A friend asked her to join her on a trip to Europe, particularly to study at a famous dance academy in Dresden, Germany, so Edith decided to go. They stayed 10 months in Europe — mainly in Germany and Austria — and although they did take dance instruction in several locations, they spent most of their time traveling and going to museums.

They lived as cheaply as possible. "People used to think we were German girls," she said, "because we didn't throw money around." She overheard an American woman "bawling out the help" in a hotel, saying "We're not some of those 10-dollar-a-day travelers." Edith added with a smile, "We wouldn't *think* of spending 10 dollars a day."



Don Brod interviews Edith Boys Enos in her Plymouth, Indiana, home.

She recalls hearing the thump-thump-thump of Hitler's followers marching in the streets. Once, when she was leaving a museum, the crowd was held up because of a parade of marchers. Some of the people in the crowd raised their right arms in the "Heil" salute. Others jeered. "Most of them didn't think Hitler could take power," she said.

When Edith returned to the United States her job at Berkeley was no longer open. In fact, because of the Depression many of her colleagues there were on half-time. "So I said, 'Sooner or later everybody has to go back to get a master's degree, so I might as well do it now.'"

So Edith went back to the University of Wisconsin to pursue a master's degree, and there she met Bert Enos. "He was there visiting friends," she said. "He was between jobs" because of the Depression. They met at a spaghetti dinner and married while Edith was still finishing her degree. After that she postponed teaching to start raising a family, which eventually consisted of two sons and two daughters.

The young couple left Madison with neither of them having a job. Bert Enos went to a now-defunct graduate school of education in the north suburbs of Chicago and then taught in nearby Lake Forest, Illinois. Edith taught part-time too even though she had an infant to care for.

At this point Edith's father stepped in and

offered Bert a job with the *Plymouth Pilot-News*, which he accepted. This could have been the end of the odyssey, but, according to Edith, "he wanted to move around." By now it was wartime, and her husband tried to enlist in the Navy. But he was rejected because he was too old and had four dependents. So he took a job with the United Press back in Madison. "He didn't have a whole lot of newspaper experience," she said, "but he was just smart enough to get away with it."

So the family moved to Madison for a while and then to Belvedere, Illinois, where Bert took a job on the paper there. The job lasted several years until "they parted company because of a difference in viewpoint." It was then that Edith's parents decided Bert would be better off running his own small paper. The *Mishawaka Enterprise* was for sale, and they put down a down payment.

The *Enterprise* was a struggling weekly with fierce competition from the *South Bend Tribune*, the daily in the city next door. Edith's fourth child was very young, but she helped out at the paper. Of her husband, Edith said, "He was smart, and he was good-looking, but he was not a good bookkeeper. He could pass any test, but he couldn't balance a check book." When a creditor would call and ask when he could expect payment, Bert would say that he would turn him over to the bookkeeper. "That was me," Edith said. "He'd hand me the phone, and I was supposed to tell them when they'd get paid."

Things didn't get any better, and Edith

decided she had to end her marriage. They tried to sell the paper, but there were no takers. "My dad was the only one who had any money in it," Edith said, so she proposed that she be allowed to go it alone. So the newspaper that the couple took over in 1949 became Edith's sole responsibility in 1951. "That's how I started, and I didn't stop for 26 years."

She had known newspapering was hard work, just from watching her father as she was growing up. "If the press broke down," she said, "he would go back after supper and wouldn't get home until after midnight." On one occasion he had newsprint in a rail car on a siding and couldn't unload it until he could pay for it. So he found a man who bought stock in the newspaper, and used the money to pay for the newsprint.

And so, with training in dance and teaching, Edith plunged into the job of putting an ailing weekly back on its feet. And gradually things began to turn around. But what did she do between 1951 when she took over the paper and 1955 when H.R. Long invited her to that first conference at SIU?

She said she read an article in the *Chicago Daily News* by an SIU professor on the problems with communities and community organizations. "He said part of the problem is that newspapers don't care about their communities," she said. "So I wrote that professor a letter and told him that he didn't know about weeklies because we certainly care about our communities." That nameless professor sent Edith's letter to Long, and Edith eventually ended up as one of 13 editors at the first conference.

"I was thrilled to go to that conference," she said. "I was such a greenhorn, and most of them didn't know how little my paper was. I almost felt like falling on my knees, I was so thankful to find such a group of people who were interested in weeklies, interested in having a voice in the community."

Edith had even more reason to be thankful for that group, then called the International Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors, in 1962. A new daily newspaper came to town intent on competing for Mishawaka readers and advertisers. It was competing mainly with the *South Bend Tribune*, but Edith's paper was caught in the middle. The ICWNE took out a full-page ad in the *Enterprise* congratulating the people of Mishawaka "for the outstandingly good qualities of their home town newspaper...and to commend you for your support of its editor, Mrs. Edith Boys Enos, who stands only for things which she believes to be good for Mishawaka."

"They ran it twice," she said, "and they paid cash in advance." The new daily lasted

five years, and when it folded Edith and the *Enterprise* were making steady progress. During the darkest days, she had convinced the previous owner to allow her to reduce her monthly payments from \$200 to \$100. "He had lots of money, and he wanted to see the paper continue. It had been in his family a long time," she said. During the 1960s she made her final payment. She also made her last \$75-a-month payment on her house.

In an effort to distinguish her paper from others in the area, Edith decided to change from broadsheet to tabloid format. But that wasn't the only mechanical change. "I think the press broke down the same week I was getting my divorce," she said, and she had the paper printed on an emergency basis by the *Pilot-News*. "It worked out so well that I decided to let them print it permanently." So she picked up a few dollars by selling the press and linotypes.

Edith was not shy about asking for advice. She was impressed with the way Leo Lerner ran his large chain of weekly papers in the Chicago area, so she wrote him a letter with some questions. "He said 'Come up and see me,' so I did. He took me to lunch and he made lots of suggestions. I wish I could have put them all to work."

One of Edith's heroes was Don Pease, Oberlin, Ohio, newspaper editor, ISWNE president, and eventually U.S. Congressman from Ohio. She asked for information on fair housing regulations, and he directed her to legislation that had been passed in Pennsylvania. "I wrote to (the governor's office) and got back some forms and more information," she said.

A woman told her that a black family had been denied entrance into a Methodist church ("I was raised a Methodist.") and she knew the area where the few blacks in Mishawaka lived did not have the city services that the rest of the city had.

So Edith and several others organized a committee to push for fair housing. "Of course, we publicized the meetings in the paper," she said, and more people joined the movement. Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame, lent his support. Even the *South Bend Tribune* got involved. "Whenever we would start some-

thing," she said, "the *Tribune* would pick it up as if it was theirs." Eventually both Mishawaka and South Bend had fair housing ordinances. "And I got started with all this by talking with Don Pease."

Edith and her paper also pushed the women's movement, publicizing the meetings of the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women and also attending many community meetings when she was the only woman in the room.

She also started a high school newspaper conference in St. Joseph County, which includes Mishawaka and South Bend. "I had a high school student working for me," she said, "and I asked her if she thought the kids from the different schools would like to get together to talk about common problems." The student thought they would, and periodic meetings were organized. The South Bend paper later took over the conference and included luncheons and speakers, but it started with Edith.

One of her accomplishments was a series of community awards. How did they start? "You remember Hous Waring? We all looked up to him." Waring, co-founder of ISWNE, started a Man of the Year award though his Littleton, Colorado, paper. "If I were going to do that," she said, "I'd have a Man of the Year and a Woman of the Year." She talked it over with her staff and decided to do it. Nominations poured in from individuals and service clubs. There was a snow storm on the night of the banquet, but "they all came. They had made reservations, and they all showed up." The city even plowed the restaurant's parking lot.

Taking an idea that she read about in *Editor & Publisher*, Edith added a George Award. "You know," she said, "someone who would do the job when everyone said, 'Let George do it.'" The annual awards continued a long as Edith kept her paper and then were handled by the Downtown Association.

She was also ahead of the curve on flexible scheduling. The three women who worked for her for "modest" wages could arrange to leave early to be home when their children came home from school or could take off for a doctor's appointment and make

up the time later. There was great camaraderie among them, and Edith said, "When we got together we would say, 'Here we come, four abreast.'"

When her parents died in the 1960s, her younger sister, Eleanor Blank, came home to take over the *Plymouth Pilot-News*. She had been living in Cleveland, but her husband had died, and there was no reason for her to stay there. So the two sisters were running the two newspapers, both printed in the same plant.

Her sister published the paper for about a decade and then decided it was time to retire. The *Pilot-News* was owned by the four siblings and the heirs of their deceased brother. The buyer was the Park Foundation, an education and media organization headquartered in Ithaca, New York.

Edith decided that it was time for her to retire too. After all, she was older than her sister. It was hard to sell the *Enterprise*, but a local woman eventually agreed to buy the paper in 1977. She made a "very small" down payment and made some more payments before telling Edith that she just couldn't make any more. But, she said, there were enough outstanding accounts to almost pay her balance. So Edith went out and collected all the bills she could. "I didn't get it all," she said, "but I got most of it."

The sale of the *Pilot-News*, not the *Enterprise*, allowed Edith to build her house in the woods. She sometimes flies to visit her sister, who now lives in New Mexico. But, mainly, she enjoys her house. She walks every day — down her lane, around her lake, and sometimes onto the campus of nearby Ancilla College. Her son, Matt Enos, says she has a ritual of walking five miles on her birthday.

But for the last few years, he says, "she has broken it down to three miles in the morning and two miles in the afternoon."

Don Brod, a member of the ISWNE board of directors, was chairman of the Department of Journalism at Northern Illinois University from 1976 to 1981 and from 1987 to 1992. He can be contacted at donbrod@earthlink.net.

When the media circus comes to town

By John Montgomery

April 24, 2006, started off like any other Wednesday.

But by the time the sun went down, a little girl was missing and the entire world would soon know about her and Purcell, Oklahoma, a town of about 6,000 in central Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Highway Patrol helicopter joined Purcell Police and the McClain County Sheriff's Department searching for 10-year-old Jamie Rose Bolin throughout the night that first day. The FBI was called in along with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation and authorities discovered the gruesome body in an upstairs apartment.

She had been lured into the apartment of a 26-year-old male on the pretense of watching an episode of "Sponge Bob Square Pants." While she was in his apartment Bolin was brutally murdered. The accused and confessed murderer, Kevin Underwood, said he planned to eat her flesh. That drew the attention of CNN and Fox as well international media. The four television stations from the Oklahoma City market were already in town.

Now we had more satellite dishes set up around town than Carter had little liver pills. Every time the chief of police, district attorney or FBI had a press conference, television stations were broadcasting live. Metro newspapers were here as well, providing daily coverage of an event in our town that we wouldn't cover until a week later.

In retrospect, we should have used our website to a larger degree. As it turned out we carried the fact she was missing early on but didn't actually put stories on the web until the following Monday morning.

We knew what was going on before the networks, other television and the metro dailies due to our relationships with the local authorities, yet we were more than a little hamstrung.

My managing editor, Susie Williams-Allen, worked almost around the clock from Thursday morning when the little girl

was officially declared missing until she was found about 2 p.m. Friday and eventually recovered around 2 a.m. Saturday morning. We covered every press conference, had photo coverage of helicopters, road blocks and the crime scene. We covered all aspects of the tragic events just like we were a daily.

Our challenge when the following Wednesday rolled around was to capture the event and still give our readers something fresh. We developed a time line that ended up being the anchor for our edition. We carried 29 photos and 15 stories in addition to the time line that started on page one and jumped to a double truck layout inside. The time line was a hit. People gobbled it up, making the more than 10 man-hours of work on that one project worth every minute. I sat down with the police chief, David Tompkins, for a three-hour interview painstakingly going over the ordeal literally minute by minute. After I wrote it, our graphic technician took over. Her work plus two proofreaders and make up took at least 10 hours.

I also contemplated the banner headline, actually composing several over the course of the weekend. I recalled when the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed.

The *Daily Oklahoman's* headline made national news and I figured our paper would be held up on television stations all around. Our water towers are adorned with big red hearts with the slogan "The Heart of Oklahoma" painted around the heart. That's our chamber of commerce's name and what we use for a variety of things. It finally came to me Sunday night what the headline would be. Since the entire community was knocked right in the pit of its stomach, I figured the perfect headline would be "Purcell, The Broken Heart of Oklahoma."

We changed our teaser portion of the front page to list each story about the incident and what page it could be located. Actually, the entire edition is one our staff took great pride in producing and looks back on with a great sense of accomplishment.

My editor and I both suffered from post traumatic syndrome. Both of us are veteran newspaper people, but this case was simply too horrible to imagine. It happened to be Good Friday when they found the body. My wife, Gracie, and I were supposed to attend Good Friday church services, but I didn't even want to go. I was made at the world, mad at God. Even though I was mad, I figured church was still the best place to be and as it turned out I was glad we went.

The following day was Saturday and it was all you could think about and all people in town wanted to talk about. One of my "duties" on Saturday morning is to head to the local Sonic Drive-In to pickup a Diet Coke for Gracie. When I arrived I noticed I hadn't shaved and made a mental note to do so when I got back to the house. I had no idea what was going on, but I went to the office, post office and made other stops each time recalling after I arrived downtown that I hadn't shaved and needed to when I got home.

I try to shave twice a day just to keep a good image in town and when I covered an auto accident around 2 p.m., still unshaven, I made mention of the strange occurrence to our fire chief. That's when he said post traumatic stress can do strange things to you.

That was the first time I really thought about it. A telephone call from my sister, Mary Clark, in Oklahoma City ended with me just uncontrollably crying for no apparent reason. I was in the midst of the syndrome and it took a while to get over it.

Back to the newspaper coverage... Our lead picture was of an FBI agent and an OHP trooper at a check point. It was due to several check points that the authorities eventually cracked the case.

The check point I snapped wasn't the check point, but was just around the corner from where they stopped Kevin Ray Underwood. He confessed after the body was discovered, becoming the second Purcell High School graduate of the class of 1998 to be a killer.

People liked and appreciated our first week's coverage. That penthouse became

the outhouse a week later when we broke the story about the two killers from the same class of 80 graduates.

That opened up old wounds from a murder/suicide that angered as many readers as we pleased the first week. You can't win 'em all.

It was quite an adventure having the parachute journalists flock into our town. I figured on Monday morning it was going to be an adventurous day as I drove to work. But, one thing I didn't consider was becoming part of the story instead of just reporting it. I was interviewed by television stations and even on a live broadcast on a Los Angeles news talk radio program.

It was all crazy, taking on a life of its own.

A gag order was placed on law enforcement just after noon on Tuesday prior to us hitting the streets on Wednesday. The district attorney tried to keep us from running the time line even though my interview was

completed prior to 12 noon. I contacted the Oklahoma Press Association attorney and he said if the gag order didn't mention us specifically we were in the clear. I never called the DA back and ran the time line. They said since we didn't print until after the order was issued, we couldn't use it.

I really can't print what I said at the time, but rest assured I was much more than a little hot under the collar.

The DA was running for reelection and really took the spotlight opportunity on the high profile case. We editorialized against him, and he lost the election July 25.

One interesting and at the time very frustrating thing was the absence of an Amber Alert. The Purcell chief of police tried over and over to get an Amber Alert issued for the missing 10-year-old in the early stages of her disappearance. However, authorities in Oklahoma City said the criteria weren't met since there was no eye witness to an abduction and no vehicle,

description or tag number.

Go figure.

If a little child is missing, they are missing in my line of thinking. By the time an alert was finally issued, Jamie Rose Bolin had long since met her demise.

I wouldn't wish the media circus on any of you in your towns. Especially, because they are never in your town unless something bad has happened — whether it be a murder, a hurricane, a tornado or an earthquake. They love a disaster.

I've been in the business since 1976 and have never seen anything compared to this.

Formal arraignment for Underwood was held Sept. 19, and he was set for trial on May 7. The media circus will most surely be back in town.

John Montgomery is publisher of the Purcell (Okla.) Register. He can be contacted at montgomeryjohnd@yahoo.com.

Newspapers have a moral obligation to recommend political candidates

By **Jim Painter**

Back in April, I attended a historic joint meeting of the city councils of four of the five cities the *West Valley View* covers. It was the first time the four councils had met together to discuss a common problem — rapidly increasing freeway congestion in the burgeoning southwest Phoenix metropolitan area.

The meeting was just two weeks after the March city elections. Each council has seven members. Of the 28, almost half of them had been up for re-election.

The audience for this historic meeting contained many of the candidates in the March elections — the winners who beat the incumbents. They were attending the meeting to bring themselves up to speed on this important issue before they were sworn into office.

The room was a minefield for the editor of a newspaper that publishes endorsement editorials in local elections.

The room was filled with people the *View* had endorsed as well as those we hadn't endorsed. Some of the incumbents we hadn't endorsed lost the election. Some of the challengers we hadn't endorsed were winners.

I didn't know where to sit without risk of being accosted, so I stood along a side wall in the crowded room.

As people filed in, many of them came over to greet me. Some of the friendliest greetings came from candidates we hadn't endorsed who ended up losing the election. I was relieved there were no angry confrontations.

After the meeting adjourned, I approached one of the four mayors. He was one of the candidates we had endorsed, but he ended up losing the election anyway.

I congratulated him on his part in the historic agreement that had just been reached among the four cities. He replied that, yes, it was truly a great moment in the history of the West Valley, and it was too bad he wouldn't be around to see it come to fruition since he had lost the election.

Then he said something that took me completely by surprise: "And I blame the *West Valley View* and you personally."

I was so shocked I didn't know what to say. We had endorsed this man, after all. We had recommended that the voters keep him as mayor. Why could he possibly be angry about that?

"Because your editorial wasn't strong enough," he said. "If your editorial hadn't been so wishy-washy, I'd still be mayor when this agreement is put into action."

Ouch.

I was flabbergasted. Over the years, I'd been snubbed by candidates our newspaper hadn't endorsed, but I'd never been berated by one we had.

I began to wonder if he had endorsed the wrong candidate.

While I think community newspapers have a responsibility to endorse in local elections (just as we have a responsibility to comment on any major issues in the community) I don't think endorsements from a local newspaper have as much influence over voters as some candidates think they do. The vast majority of voters will cast their ballots for their favorite candidates regardless of who their newspaper recommends. We might sway a few people who are still undecided as Election Day approaches, but overall, I think our endorsements are nothing more than a newspaper editorial board expressing another opinion — one that many of our readers will gleefully disagree with.

We aren't "telling people how to vote," as some endorsement-editorial opponents claim. If I tell a friend that my favorite ice cream flavor is Ben & Jerry's Cherry Garcia and he should try it sometime, I don't expect him to interpret that comment as my telling him what flavor of ice cream he *must* eat. Neither I nor any newspaper that I know of has that kind of power.

Endorsement editorials (and editorials in general) are no different — "based on the information we have at hand, this is the course of action we recommend. But your mind is your own, dear reader; we have no control over your actions."

What are they teaching these kids nowadays?

I have always worked for newspapers that published endorsement editorials and I just assumed such editorials were as American as the Fourth of July.

But then, about four or five years ago during a staff meeting in which we were discussing our endorsements in an upcoming local election, a young reporter asked why we found it necessary to write such editorials. He said endorsement editorials were unprofessional, unethical, embarrassing to him as a journalist and they just indicated to our readers that we, as a newspaper, were biased. The other twentysomething reporters in the room agreed with him.

Needless to say, I was taken aback. This was my first indication that people within our profession questioned the wisdom of publishing endorsement editorials.

My first reaction was anger. "What are they teaching these kids in journalism schools these days?" I wondered.

However, when Chad Stebbins asked me to write an article on the subject for *Grassroots Editor*, I did some research on the Web and found that there's a whole new generation of journalists, known as bloggers, who think that the mainstream media is doing the public a disservice, and showing that they are blatantly biased by endorsing political candidates.

In my opinion, it's the concept of an "unbiased" press that is doing the public a disservice. There is no such thing as an unbiased press. Deep down, we all know that to be true, but no one in the mainstream media wants to admit it publicly.

We would like to leave our readers (or viewers or listeners, as the case may be) with the impression that, as professional journalists, we are somehow the masters of our personal biases, which, in a sense, makes us god-like creatures. I've known a lot of newspaper people in my life, and I can assure you, we are not god-like creatures.

A review of the history of the American press reveals that the notion that the people

who present the news should be unbiased is a fairly recent one.

American newspapers would gain a lot more respect from the public if we just admitted our biases like the newspapers of yore. There was a time in our history when we proclaimed our political leanings in our nameplates. We still have newspapers such as the Easton, Md., *Star Democrat*, the Pottsville, Pa., *Republican*, the Santa Rosa, Calif., *Democrat*, the Marion, Ill., *Daily Republican*, to name just a few. Others have altered their names over the years to hide their political leanings (the *Arizona Republican* became the *Arizona Republic*).

I long for the old days when American newspapers were honest about where they stood politically. I'm not saying we should go back to the days when newspapers aligned themselves with one political party or the other and endorsed only the candidates for their party of preference, but why should we be afraid to recommend the best candidate for a particular political job regardless of his party affiliation? Why can't we proclaim our bias for a candidate based on his abilities?

Bias is an unavoidable human characteristic. We cannot deny it, but we can control it.

We have an obligation to be fair and accurate in our presentation of the news. Editors have a responsibility to be mindful of overtly biased language in news copy and eliminate it.

The very words reporters choose while writing their stories are the result of subconscious biases ("I like this word more than that one").

Adjectives themselves could be construed as biased words. When I step out of my house on a typical August day in Arizona, I might say it's hot. My wife, on the other hand, will probably put on her jacket. Each individual perceives the world in a slightly different way, even reporters. No two people will describe the same scene in the same way, because we each see the world from a different point of view. Points of view can be defined as biases.

Fairness and accuracy are all we can ask of our reporters.

A flaw in the logic

But opinion pages are a different story altogether.

Editorials, by definition, are opinion columns expressing the opinions of a publi-

cation. An opinion, as defined by *Merriam-Webster*, is: 1 a: a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter 2 a: belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge.

Why do we write editorials? Mainly because we want to sway people's opinions and convince them to take a particular course of action on a given issue.

And yet, many journalists think it's wrong for newspapers to try to sway public opinion, especially when it comes to elections.

In my research, I came across the following in an online column (dated Nov. 11, 2004) from the *Marco Island Sun Times* in Florida:

"We've discussed this issue many times here at the *Marco Island Sun Times*, and we decided that if we're going to do anything about elections and candidates, it'll be a full review of who's who during an election year rather than endorsements. We feel our readers should be informed, and we'll inform them as best as we can. But we also feel that endorsing candidates crosses the line of a newspaper's job description. It gets into opinion, something we just don't do here.

"Now, if a newspaper has an editorial page, which is for opinions, that would be the right spot for an endorsement. But it still smacks of trying to sway readers a certain way. As mentioned above, we don't do that. We feel readers should be informed of all candidates, not pointed in a certain direction. They must decide according to their own convictions and beliefs."

To me, the columnist displays a glaring flaw in logic. He writes an opinion column trying to sway his readers to agree with his opinion that newspapers shouldn't write opinion columns that try to sway readers' opinions. His newspaper doesn't do that, he declares in a column that does exactly that.

On the other hand, I wholeheartedly agree with him that newspapers have a responsibility to provide a review of the "who's who" of the candidates. Every duty-bound newspaper will provide readers with profiles of each and every candidate in any local election. Every duty-bound newspaper will allow each and every candidate the same opportunity to present his or her stands on the issues. Every duty-bound newspaper will do these things as fairly and as accurately as is humanly possible.

But there's one thing that newspapers can do that most average citizens cannot do:

Sit down with each candidate and discuss those issues face-to-face. It gives the newspaper's editorial board a chance to see the candidates up close and personal — to see how they act and react away from the public eye. Such encounters can be very valuable and very revealing.

Newspaper reporters and editors, because they frequently come in contact with elected officials and political candidates, are often in a better position to judge the character, the knowledge and the experience of the candidates than the average citizen.

That's why we're in a position — and have a moral obligation — to make recommendations for voters who haven't yet decided who to vote for.

Would you have endorsed Hitler's opponent?

In answer to the opponents of endorsement editorials, I have created a hypothetical scenario: What if every American newspaper editor suddenly found himself transported to an alternate universe. In this alternate universe, a presidential candidate named Adolf Hitler is running against a typical American presidential candidate — a Hillary Clinton or a John McCain. In this alternate universe, the only people who know the true nature of the Hitler candidate would be the newspaper editors. Would you endorse? Or would you refuse to endorse out of fear that you might appear to your readers to be "biased" against Mr. Hitler? Clearly, there are some situations in which bias is not necessarily a bad thing.

Thankfully, I've never met a political candidate as bad as Adolf Hitler. However, I have met many a candidate whom I knew to have low moral and ethical standards. I've also met many candidates who had little knowledge of the issues, a total misunderstanding of the issues, and/or a fuzzy concept of the way government works. In such cases, what is my responsibility to the public?

I think my responsibility is clear: My newspaper should tell our readers which candidates we think would serve them the best.

In the end, we get the government we deserve.

Jim Painter, a member of the ISWNE board of directors, is managing editor of the West Valley View in Litchfield Park, Ariz. He can be contacted at editor@westvalleyview.com.

Endorsements help promote meaningful community dialogue

By Lori Evans

I was with friends that Friday morning when the newspaper endorsement for governor came out. It had been an agonizing editorial to write. The candidate who was the newspaper's pick was not my personal favorite. As executive editor of the newspaper, I had one vote on our two-person editorial board; my publisher had two. But I was the one who wrote the editorials.

"Why do you endorse candidates anyway?" one friend asked, a bit harshly I thought. The candidate she favored had not been endorsed.

"Because that's what newspapers do," said another friend before I had a chance to open my mouth. I was relieved not to have to defend myself or the newspaper or the newspaper's pick for governor.

A third friend sat quietly. I had shared my angst with her the previous week when I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt which candidate the newspaper would endorse. What should I do? I had asked her. I really believed my preferred candidate was the best choice for the future of the state. My publisher disagreed. At various times during the campaign, I had toyed with resigning over the issue. But I really liked my job, and I really liked and respected my publisher. The inability to reach agreement on this one issue was the exception not the rule.

My friend answered my questions with questions of her own: Is your boss asking you to do anything illegal? Definitely not, I answered. Is he asking you to do anything unethical? Well, I tried to joke, it depends on your politics. But, the answer was, again, no. Is he asking you to do something he doesn't have a right to ask you to do? Again, no.

I knew how the system worked. We would talk over issues and 99 times out of 100 reach some kind of consensus on the stand the paper would take. He'd give a little; I'd give a little. But I knew he had the last word — and one more vote than I had. I also knew I was lucky that my arguments were heard. I

believed our differences of opinion and perspective helped make the newspaper's editorials better.

The publisher felt as strongly about his pick for governor as I felt about mine. He was not oblivious to the internal struggle I was having. He had offered to write the editorial, but that was part of my job. And, if he wrote this one, what other editorials would he want to write? That was territory where I didn't want to tread. At least if I wrote the endorsement, I knew I could include some things about the candidate I favored.

The publisher and I were not the only people who disagreed about this race. Prominent Republicans and Democrats had crossed party lines to support the other side's candidate. I talked to some of those people; I talked to a friend who had worked for both candidates; I talked to other people whose opinion I valued who supported the candidate that I did not.

I wrote the editorial. A few days later, the newspaper's pick for governor was elected.

* * * * *

I'm thankful not all endorsements are such an ordeal to write. But every election season, I ask the same thing my friend asked when she learned the newspaper had not supported her favorite candidate: Why do newspapers endorse candidates anyway?

We know we're going to make people mad, no matter who we endorse. At times, it has appeared endorsements are the kiss of death for a candidate's campaign; the endorsed candidates lose the election. What good does that do? Do we divide the community with our endorsements? Are endorsements some kind of weird ego trip for the newspaper? Do we hurt the newspaper with our endorsements?

When I wrote editorials as the editor of a daily, I never worried about what effect they might have on the newspaper's bottom line. I figured that was the publisher's job. As editor

and publisher of one weekly newspaper in a community that has two weekly newspapers, try as I might, I do worry that advertisers and subscribers won't like what we say and will take their business to Brand X. I hate that I have this concern, but I do.

Nevertheless, I believe newspapers should endorse candidates and take stands on the issues on the ballot. It's one way we take a leadership role in the community. If we are doing our job correctly, a newspaper can play a key role in helping a community reach its goals by the stands it takes on its opinion pages, including its endorsements.

Having said that, however, I've been wimping out on endorsing for local offices. My experience is that most people who run for city council want to do what's right for the community. Some may be more qualified than others, but all are sincere in wanting to make a difference. There seem to be few distinctions between most local candidates.

The newspaper fulfills its role by providing the community with good information on which to base its decisions. In fact, I believe the most important service the newspaper offers is giving the community good, accurate information. In the long run, does it really matter who, if anyone, agrees with the newspaper's opinion?

* * * * *

When I was a beginning journalist 30-plus years ago, there was a school of thought that journalists should not vote because, if they did, they would not be fair in the coverage of the candidates or the issues they did not support. I bought into that argument for a few years, but the longer I worked for newspapers, the more nonsensical that line of reasoning became to me. After all, wasn't I in a better position than most to knowledgeably vote on the issues and select the candidates who would do the best job? I had sat through the community forums, reported on the issues, talked to the candidates face to face. I had a great opportunity to put that informa

tion I had gathered to good use at the ballot box. Where was it written that journalists were prohibited from being good citizens? I registered as a nonpartisan and have been voting ever since.

For the same reasons that it makes sense for journalists to vote, it makes sense for newspapers to write endorsements. We use a great deal of ink telling voters about the candidates and writing about the issues. We hear the candidates in a variety of forums that many of our readers don't have the time or the inclination to attend. It's right and reasonable to use that information we have gathered to help shape the future of the community through our endorsements.

In addition to helping shape the future of our communities, there's another reason for newspapers to endorse: Endorsements help

promote meaningful community dialogue. And that can only be a good thing.

It's troubling that as a society we no longer seem to be able to agree to disagree in a civil manner — or any manner at all. If your community seems almost evenly divided on just about every issue, as our does, it's imperative that those with differing viewpoints be able to talk with one another respectfully. Newspapers can help set the tone for that kind of dialogue in the way we write our endorsements and other editorials. We can encourage people to express differing viewpoints.

Unfortunately, I've had more than one businessperson tell me they won't write a letter to the editor or speak out on an issue because they fear it will harm their livelihood. While I understand their concern — I

have it with the newspaper — I believe one of the greatest threats to our country is a reluctance to exercise our rights to free speech and the press. When economic concerns trump our willingness to express our opinion and take precedence over our responsibilities as citizens, we put all of our freedoms at risk.

Bottom line? Endorsements and other editorials are important because they constantly remind our readers that we all have the ability and responsibility to express our opinions and those opinions can help shape a community for the good.

Lori Evans is editor and publisher of the Homer (Alaska) News. The Homer News is a Morris Communications Corp. newspaper. She can be contacted at lori.evans@homernews.com.

Many voters need a bit of help

By **Bill Meyer**

Though fewer people go to the polls these days, some continue to need help in selecting candidates.

As during bygone days of strong editors who wrote "fire in the belly" opinion pieces, there continues to be a need for endorsing political candidates.

Why?

Face facts. In spite of media efforts to bring informative and well researched articles about each and every candidate, the public pays scant attention.

A few years ago, the student newspaper at University of Kansas assigned a lone candidate to each budding journalist, to write an endorsement for that one candidate.

All candidates were represented, one per student. They were assigned candidates without regard to personal choice. What seemed like an ideal method to present the facts in an unbiased way didn't accomplish that goal.

Remember that the label on this page is "opinion" and not "take your choice" or "figure it out for yourself."

There's much to be said for the Socratic

method of instruction, challenging students with questions instead of telling them the answers. In short, don't tell them "what" to think, teach them "how" to think.

Newspaper editors are in a better position to evaluate candidates than the average person who bases opinion on television commercials or coffee shop rumors.

Most editors are trained in political science, study sociology and logic. They also have experience.

The editor has access not available to others. Candidates seek out the editor, giving both the opportunity to meet eyeball-to-eyeball. This editor had 57 years experience before being turned out to pasture. He had the opportunity to work with local, state, and national public figures. The conclusion formed over these decades was that weak candidates or office holders should be eliminated, no matter what the political affiliation might be. Those who have performed well in office should be retained, no matter what the political affiliation might be.

Though the writer is a lifelong Republican, he supported such Democrats as Harry Truman, the two Dockings, John Carlin, and will vote for Kathleen Sebelius again.

Sen. Jim Barnett, M.D., is a strong candidate who would get our support if Sebelius weren't doing such a good job. Barnett also is doing a good job, and should remain as a leader in the state senate.

Bill Avery was one of Kansas' best governors, defeated after one term due to supporting payroll-deduction for state income tax. Mike Hayden, another one-term Republican, lost to Democrat Joan Finney who in turn was defeated for re-election due to lack of ability.

Even though Marion County is strongly Republican, there are Democrats who will be supported (as was Dan Glickman in the past).

Don't be burdened by party labels, understand the issues and learn the names of candidates whose views you support.

Look beyond gun control, abortion and gay marriage, get the facts on your state board of education, the insurance commissioner, secretary of state, and others.

If in doubt, don't vote. Or, follow endorsements (if your editor has courage to print them).

Bill Meyer is president of Hoch Publishing Co., Inc. in Marion, Kansas. He can be contacted at meyer@marionkansas.com.

A contrary view of endorsing candidates

By **Dan Hammes**

Consider this an endorsement for not endorsing candidates.

Which makes it little more than blasphemy — at least in journalistic circles.

Everyone working in area of journalism dealing with opinion writing knows that it is the duty of newspapers to endorse candidates in political races.

We know that because it is repeated at virtually every journalism conference we attend. Endorsements are the *Holy Grail* of newspaper opinion writing. Newspapers that do not publish endorsements are considered to be derelict in their duty, cowardly or worse.

The vigor with which those views are presented, and their popularity among newspaper types, however, has not convinced me. I think there is a more important role newspapers must serve.

Fairness.

I know, I know — editors everywhere (at least those reading this drivel) are gnashing their teeth at the thought that endorsing candidates is somehow less than sacred — much less wrong.

In brief, I believe that a community served by only one newspaper is not well-served

when that newspaper endorses one candidate over another. Assuming, of course, the newspaper's editorial page is any good.

Those of us who write opinion pieces on a regular basis build credibility with our readers. That credibility, built over years of what we hope is reasoned, well-crafted opinion writing, serves to influence readers. If it doesn't, we should find another line of work.

There is no question that a respected editorialist influences voters by endorsing candidates. But when only one newspaper serves a community, is that equitable? Is the public well-served by the process?

Sure, editorial writing is not meant to be objective. Nor equitable. That is the point, after all.

But it is a rare political race in which an adequate argument could not be made for supporting either candidate. To presume that somehow an editorial writer — or worse — an editorial board — can somehow divine which candidate will better serve the people stretches the imagination. The same person who builds the argument for Candidate X could easily craft just as reasonable argument for Candidate Y.

To quote the old maid after she kissed the cow, the difference, *in most cases*, really is a matter of taste.

And that's fine. That is the stuff with which interesting, invigorating, thought-provoking editorial pages are made. Besides, many newspapers will gladly provide space to the other candidate to rebut the arguments made by the editor to vote for his opponent. But then we're back to the credibility thing. A candidate, or his supporter, writing to rebut an editorial against him is really bringing a knife to a gun fight.

(Of course, if he does a better job of it, there is an opportunity to hire a good columnist.)

There was a time when virtually every community, from the largest cities to the smallest town, was served by at least two newspapers. Typically the newspapers would represent a particular political view so both candidates in a race would be endorsed by "their" newspaper. The day of the two-newspaper town is long gone. So is the iron-clad, dead-certain argument that newspapers must endorse candidates.

Yes, a decent argument can be made that newspapers should endorse candidates. But, just like most political races, the contrary view is also credible.

Dan Hammes is publisher of the St. Maries Gazette Record in Idaho. He can be contacted at Dan@smsgazette.com.

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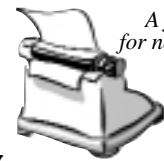
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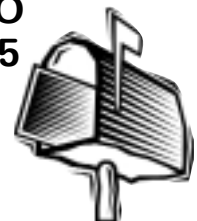
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