

# grassroots editor



*A journal  
for newspeople*

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# To print or not to print:

## *Hix's students survey newspaper editors regarding alleged rape involving athletes*

To print or not to print the names in the newspaper in your hamlet was the question. The answer generally was yes if . . . or no until. . .

The question was whether to print the names of two star high school basketball players who were dropped from their team "for disciplinary reasons" after a woman complained to police that she had been raped in their hotel room. No charges have been filed against the two teenagers.

ISWNE member Harry Hix, Engleman/Livermore Professor of Community Journalism at the University of Oklahoma, recently assigned members of his class to contact community newspaper editors or publishers to seek their reactions on two news coverage issues involving ethical or legal questions.

One question posed was about a situation occurring in Oklahoma, a situation that easily could be faced by community newspapers anywhere in the country. Here is the question:

Two star players on your high school basketball team, ages 17 and 18, were dropped from the team Monday after the team returned from playing in a tournament out of state. No reason was given except for disciplinary purposes. However, you discover that a 19-year-old woman at the tournament site complained to police that she was raped while in the boys' hotel room. No charges have been filed, but police acknowledge they are investigating the two boys as suspects. Do you write a story and do you identify the boys by name?

Generally, editors agreed that they would do a story, but conditions were expressed. Most said they would not use the names unless and until charges were filed. Most would still not use the name of the 17-year-old unless he was charged as an adult.

Many noted that in small communities the names would be public knowledge anyway because as soon as the coach dropped the players from the team everyone would know about it.

Students contacted editors by telephone or email. Here is a sampling of the answers received from Oklahoma editors and publishers.

"We write the story, but do not name the suspects until they are charged." —James John, *Sulpher Times*.

"Yes, we would write a story if the police had identified them as prime suspects; no, we would not identify them by name. However, in a small town if they were dropped from the team, most people would be able to figure out who they were. If there was enough evidence to file charges, and they were filed against as adults, at that point we would identify them by name in a follow-up story." —Ray Lokey, *Johnston County Capital-Democrat*, Tishomingo.

"Write the story, but do not use the names of the two boys. They have not been charged. Very important. Once you start this story, do a complete followup through charges, if filed, through

final disposition.” —Ralpy Schaefer, *Tulsa Business Journal*.

“I wouldn’t print their names. You can print the names at a later date if charges are filed.” —Angela Jinkens, *The Okeene Record*.

“Our sports editor would likely do a story indicating they were not playing due to disciplinary reasons. If charges were later filed, we would then do a story on that, probably on the front page.” —Bruce Willingham, *McCurtain Gazette*, Idabel.

“I would print whatever the coach says. I think it’s up to each newspaper.” —Matt Miller, *Southeast Times*, Idabel.

“Our general policy is to not identify suspects in crime stories until charges are filed. However, in unusual cases we do identify them, and this qualifies as an unusual case because the boys have been dropped from the team and the public will want to know why. Since this is a small town, many people will know of the alleged incident anyway, and some of them will have the story wrong. It is up to us to see that the public gets the facts rather than gossip.

“So, we would publish the story and use the names of the two players. We would not identify the alleged victim by name, and we would consider an editorial questioning the school’s policy of dropping the players from the team based on allegations rather than arrest or conviction on a criminal charge. Suspension seems more appropriate until such time as they are convicted of a crime.” —Jim Mayo, *Sequoyah County Times*, Sallisaw.

Editors and publishers from outside Oklahoma made similar responses. Here is a sampling:

“I would do a story, but I would not use their names unless they were charged as adults.” —Dale Blegen, *The De Smet News*, De Smet, S.D.

“We would only write the story once charges have been filed, and then we would name the 18-year-old, but not the 17-year-old because South Dakota law forbids the release of under-age-18 youths in criminal cases. In such a crime, if charges are filed, the 17-year-old would probably be moved to adult court, at which time we could print the name and would do so.” —Larry Atkinson, *Mobridge Tribune*, Mobridge, S.D.

“Yes, we would write the story based on facts from the coach. No, we would not use the boys’ names unless and until they were formally charged with the crime.” —Marcia Wood, *Sangre de Cristo Chronicle*, Angel Fire, N.M.

“I would assume that the two dailies in our coverage would release this first. This would take the edge off the problem for me. If they name names, then so do I. If they do not, I wouldn’t unless the police release a name to me and that person is charged with something. I would never name the 17-year-old in the charge. I’m certain

that within one week the AP would splash it all over. By that time, I would feel more confidence in naming names. And by then, I would too.” —Fred Steiner, *Bluffton News*, Bluffton, Ohio.

“I think I would handle it this way: I would run the story without using the players’ names and try to keep it low key and void of emotion, reporting just the facts. I probably would try to get a comment from the coach. I would make every effort to keep the story from assuming the guilt of the two. In Missouri, a 17-year-old is tried as an adult, so I would run the names of both boys if, and when, charges were filed.” —Betty Stanley, *Ozark County Times*, Ozark County, Mo.

Some editors indicated that the decision involved social and moral considerations as well as ethical and legal ones and that the school’s role in the event is part of the story. These editors tended to give longer answers to the question.

Peter Frank, editor of the *Lake Country Echo* in Pequot Lakes, Minn., commented, “Yes, of course we run a story. What would be in it is the hard part. At the minimum, it would provide the fact that two players were suspended and anything else that was public information. I would be very, very careful with the accusations, however. Without charges filed, I would most likely not report on them.”

However, Frank said he would try to talk to the 18-year-old and use his name in reporting anything the youth might say. The underage youth was another issue, he said, adding that anyone in the stands would see who was not playing. “I’m not sure which way I would go,” he said.

The rape issue caused concern, he said, explaining that these cases “tend to mark even an innocent person for life” and “I use a lot of restraint before publishing them.” He concluded that the circumstances would have to be made public through a school disciplinary process or by having charges filed before he would “feel journalistically comfortable running the information.”

The editor of the *Mahnomen Pioneer* in Mahnomen, Minn., offered these observations:

“If no charges have been filed, we are unlikely to give the names of the two individuals being investigated. It doesn’t matter if they are star players or not, as all individuals are treated the same.

“A short story mentioning that two players were dropped from the team while an investigation is conducted into activities that occurred while the team was at the tournament may be necessary — but no names at this time. Maybe a comment from the coach regarding supervision

of students while out on overnight stays for school-related events would be in order.

“My concern would be centered on why the 19-year-old woman was in their room, especially if this was a school-related function. In this matter, our local school board would be calling the coach and chaperones to task for allowing male-female interaction in students’ rooms after events, which is taken seriously here. Another point is that the complaint is from a 19-year-old woman. There may be charges of statutory rape against her. What was she doing in a room with a minor? They didn’t drag her there. Other concerns would be brought up. I would want to see a copy of any reports filed by the police department prior to writing a more in-depth story. Where did the information regarding this situation come from? What is its source?

“These may be star players, but they aren’t pro athletes and they aren’t public figures, so you need to be extremely careful when writing about them, not to cast doubt on their character unless they are facing actual legal actions against them.

“I would be sure to check my facts before I published any story and the name would only appear after charges had been filed. In the case of the 17-year-old, his name might not appear at all.”

Judy Johnson, editor of *The Times* of Acadiana in Lafayette, La., said athletes are viewed as public figures and sometimes are taught that the rules of society don’t apply to them.

“You run the story,” she said. “Whether we like it or not, our culture tends to make public figures of athletes, even at the very young level of high school. You report the name of the 18-year-old, but not of the 17-year-old if your state’s laws consider him a minor for these purposes.”

Johnson said the story should include details of official reports, but should not include the name of the woman or any information that would allow people to identify her. She stressed that the story should make clear that these are complaints or charges, not guilty verdicts.

“You allow the young athletes or their representative (usually an attorney) to make a statement. You ask the school to comment, though if they have any sense (or a good attorney) they won’t.

“And you make damn sure you follow the story all the way to its conclusion. If it turns out the charges are false, you play them the same place in your paper that you would have played the story if the charges had proven to be true, and in the same place you played the initial story or in a more prominent spot.”

This is demanded because rape is a serious crime, a debilitating one, she said. Johnson said

newspapers owe to their readers to cover the crime of rape regardless of where it occurs in the community.

"This includes school communities," she said. "Schools that look the other way when 'their boys' get into 'a little trouble' only teach those young athletes that the rules of our society don't extend to them. A lesson they will eventually have to unlearn, sometimes at a terrible cost to them and to others.

"Yes, you print the story. You hope it isn't true, but you print it. And you follow it to its end."

The question was based on an actual incident that occurred in Oklahoma. Their names appeared in most stories reporting the incident.

Both players, prior to the incident, had announced acceptance of scholarships to play basketball at two well-known Division I universities.

As it turned out, no charges were filed. The woman declined to follow through on her complaint and police decided against charges following a grand jury report. The players were not reinstated to the team.

The second question dealt with editorial writing rather than a specific news coverage issue. The question was: "When writing an editorial critical of an elected or appointed official, particularly if you have a decent relationship with that person prior to that point, do you alert the person that the editorial is upcoming?"

Some answers were firm "yes" and "no" responses, but many publishers and editors qualified their answers in several ways.

Representative of the firm "no" answers were the responses of two Georgia publishers.

"My answer is no. I do not give prior warning to public officials that a critical editorial is on the way," said Gay Wiley Shook of *The Weekly* in Peachtree Corners. Cal Beverly of *The Citizen* in Fayetteville agreed: "No. I can't think of a single instance that I've ever notified an official in advance of a column or editorial."

Roy Faulkenberry, editor of the *Heavener* (Okla.) *Ledger*, said no, noting that he has run into situations where officials were notified and "they always will try and convince you to change your editorial to how they want."

Others stated simply that it was the newspaper's policy not to notify officials of an impending editorial.

Some responding with a "no" qualified their answers. For example, David Hein, editor of the *Crestview Bulletin* in Crestview, Fl., suggested that if the issue is significant enough to warrant an editorial the officials involved should realize that the newspaper would be commenting editorially.

A few editors, such as C. Ross Coyle of the *Blanchard News* in Blanchard, Okla., said they would notify, but gave no reason for the "yes" answer.

Explanations for a "yes" answer varied.

"It's a matter of personal preference, of course, but being a Southerner raised in the traditions of the South, which include hospitality and courtesy, my answer is yes," replied Judy Johnson of *The Times of Acadiana* in Lafayette, La. Candy Rowe of the *Grove Sun* in Grove, Okla., said, "I would say 'yes,' notify them as it is always wise to try to mitigate any hard feelings."

ISWNE member Art Drake of the *Waunakee Tribune* in Wisconsin offered this response:

"Yes, I usually alert them that a critical editorial is coming. This usually comes as I am doing the basic preparation for the editorial, specifically getting their side of the story. If the official is up to something that I don't agree with, I call and ask them to respond to my objections.

"During the course of this conversation, I'll mention that I'm thinking of writing an editorial on this topic and I'd like them to respond to these points. That makes my editorial better and preserves the relationship with the official. And maybe one of us makes the other see the error of his ways."

ISWNE member David Cox, managing editor of *Areawide Media* in Salem, Ark., commented, "I do tell them in advance, whether or not I have a good relationship with them. I think part of my reluctance to do that in the early years was fear they would talk me out of it, and they do try, but unless they can produce compelling reasons to not publish it, I run with it."

Another ISWNE member, Jim Mayo, publisher of the *Sequoyah County Times* in Sallisaw, Okla., on occasion notifies an official.

"As a practical matter, sometimes I tell them a critical editorial is upcoming, and sometimes not. Usually not," he said. "Ours is a small newspaper in a small market, so I see local officials frequently. When we write something critical of an official's action, our position is usually not a surprise to them. We make space available to anyone who disagrees with something we have written. Usually in the letters column."

A different viewpoint was expressed by Dave Mitchell, editor and publisher of the *Point Reyes, Calif., Point Reyes Light*, who noted that he rarely notified public officials of a forthcoming critical editorial.

"I have, however, warned friendly politicians I am going to keep hammering them editorially until they fix something in their purview that needs fixing," he said.

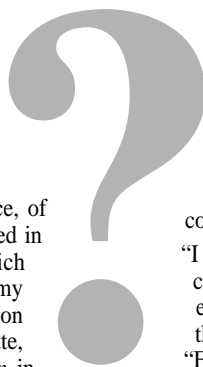
"For example, I am on good terms with our county supervisor, and the *Point Reyes Light* endorsed him for election and re-election. When the public dump here closed, county government didn't step in and provide an alternative dropoff site. The *Light* then began a three-year drumbeat of frequent criticisms of the supervisor failing to look after his constituents. We have remained on good terms, but he knows to expect periodic criticism on this issue."

Another viewpoint was that of ISWNE member Robert Estabrook of Lakeville, Conn., who said his answer would depend partly on the size of the community.

"Ideally, I think a journalist ought to keep a professional distance between himself/herself and the elected or appointed public official," he said. "That is not always possible in a small community when you are more likely to know the public official as a friend.

"In such a situation I would see nothing wrong in telling a friend to expect criticism, so long as you don't let him or her talk you out of it on grounds of friendship. But that is a delicate situation, and perhaps it is better to put the friendship on hold so long as the friend is in office."

The replies seem to indicate that there is no set answer to the question and that whatever the answer the reasons will vary.



# H.R. Long's last days with ISWNE: Why the Society left SIU-Carbondale

By Rick Friedman

To borrow from Charles Dickens, a fellow newspaper person, Dr. Howard Rusk Long's last days with the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors were the best of times and the worst of times.

I met H.R. (as I later got to call him) in the spring of 1960. Little did I know then how much over the next 15 years that meeting would influence my own life, the life of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors and of life of Long himself. I was 29, H.R. was 51.

In November 1959, I had jumped from editor of a tiny weekly newspaper, the *Cape May County News*, in Wildwood, N.J., to associate editor of *Editor & Publisher* magazine, the premier weekly journal covering daily newspapers around the world. Its headquarters was at 42nd Street and Broadway, "Crossroads of the World," but it had never covered weekly newspapers on a regular basis in its almost 75-year history.

In the spring of 1960, I was assigned to an "Education in Journalism" convention at Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pa. I looked up one afternoon and there was H.R. looming over me. I had never heard of him or of Southern Illinois University.

My first memories of the tall educator were the overly-wide shoulders, the big, rough hands, the slight stoop. I didn't know then that those shoulders, hands and stoop came from pulling plows, seeding, planting and sowing on Missouri and Indiana farms before H.R. went into journalism education. I would later watch with admiration as he turned on a Missouri farm boy country bumpkin routine to totally disarm a top exec of the Ford Foundation in New York City as "this hayseed" picked his organizational pockets.

That day in 1960, Long told me about a small group of editors from around the country called the "International Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors" and how since 1955 they had

been meeting annually each summer in and around Carbondale in southern Illinois. Like most of the rest of the world, I had never heard of ICWNE.

Long suggested that I cover the upcoming conference in someplace called Herrin, Ill., which I also never heard of. I replied that to my knowledge, *E&P*, in its long history, had never sent a single soul out of New York City to cover an event involving weekly newspapers. "Write the publisher and invite me," I suggested. He did.

A short time later I was called into Publisher and Editor Bob Brown's office and asked if I would like to go to Herrin, Ill., for four days to cover the ICWNE. I did, and it changed the weekly newspaper coverage of *E&P* forever. I began a regular "Weekly Editor" column, a first about weeklies, that would last until I left *E&P* in March 1969. I would do special stories on "Golden Quills" for editorial writing and Lovejoy "Courage in Journalism" winners, both of them Long's beautiful babies. For the first time in its long history, the *E&P* Yearbook listed weekly newspapers in the United States and Canada.

For a decade Long and I had a symbiotic relationship. He used *E&P* to publicize the conference and its great editors, some of whom would achieve international fame during the turbulent Sixties. I became both his and their Boswell. I, in turn, used the conference to further my own journalism career in a direction I never would have guessed at until I met H.R. When we were together, we made a journalism odd couple: short, dark Semitic-looking, East Coaster me, and tall, gangly, weather-beaten Midwesterner Long.

From that first conference in tiny Herrin, I would cover every ICWNE (later renamed the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors) until I became a weekly newspaper journalist in 1969 and a member of the conference, which I still am. Each summer, Long brought together great weekly newspaper minds, such as Bill Rotch, Karl Monroe and Landon Wills. I did the editorial critiques each year into the 1970s, facing up to the likes

of Houstoun Waring, and telling them to get ads off their editorial pages.

Most of these editors were among the most idealistic, liberal newspaper people I ever met and by the late 1960s they were clashing with Long's own strong, now-conservative ideals, which had radically changed because of the campus unrest that had overtaken SIU. In the early part of the decade he had created a Golem from those weekly newspaper editors to fight evil in the world. By the end of the decade, the Golem helped lead to his own eventual fall from grace and end the SIU/ISWNE alliance, so intrinsically linked at the journalism hip it had looked as if it would last into eternity.

At the same time, he was creating as its first chair in 1953 a super-fine Department of Journalism and later School of Journalism on the fast-growing SIU campus. The *Daily Egyptian* student newspaper was one of the finest such publications in the country. I loved visiting their offices and chatting with the students when I was in the St. Louis area. *E&P* had never hired an associate editor off a college newspaper until the middle-1960s. At my recommendation, the magazine hired SIU graduate Ed Rappetti right from the *Daily Egyptian*. In the early 1970s, when, as a weekly editor, I had a chance to do my own hiring, some of my best young reporters came from SIU.

Long, as well as SIU, became victims of their own success. Much of it can be found in *Daily Egyptian* stories on the Internet, from which some of this report is taken. In 1948, when President Delyte Morris arrived at SIU, it was a "suitcase school, because most of its 3,000 students lived within 50 miles of Carbondale and went home weekends," according to the *Egyptian*. By 1970, it was an international university with 23,000 students and two other campuses in Edwardsville and Springfield. Academic programs had gone from 27 to 60.

Research funds had skyrocketed from \$16,856 to more than \$9 million. There was a faculty of 285 in 1948 and 3,645 in

1970. The library bore Morris' name and his statue stood guard over it. SIU and the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana had become fierce fighters for the educational bucks flowing out of the Illinois State Legislature at Springfield.

According to the *Egyptian*, as SIU expanded in the 1960s, Morris became a "benevolent dictator. He changed blue prints to new buildings at night. He recruited faculty by himself. The students loved him until Vietnam and the 1968 Democratic Convention. By then, they had little contact with him. They saw him as overbearing and paternalistic."

Again, according to the *Egyptian*, Morris wasn't ready for the demonstrations on campus, including one on May 12, 1970, when students demanded the university be closed in deference to the killing of four students at Kent State on May 4. Some 5,000 demonstrators camped on the lawns of his office and home. They hurled rocks through his windows. His home was vandalized. Fortunately, Morris and his family were whisked beforehand off-campus to a Marion, Ill., hotel.

H.R. had securely tied himself to Morris' educational rocket. Morris was a familiar face on overseas ISWNE trips. H.R. rose high in the educational sky with him. When Morris' rocket crashed and burned in 1970, H.R. crashed and burned with it. By association, he became a pariah at SIU.

H.R.'s veer to the right probably intensified in June 1969. Old Main Hall, one of the historic buildings on campus and a symbol of SIU, burned down. Valuable manuscripts were lost in the blaze, according to the *Egyptian*. Arson was suspected. Long now clashed with ISWNE members over the tight clamp he had put on the student newspaper. His argument was that they were too irresponsible and immature to edit it. He closely edited it for them.

Jack Blum, chief council for the Senate Anti-trust Committee in the late 1960s and a great friend of ISWNE, accompanied ISWNE on a trip to Taiwan and Manila. He recently recalled how that trip caused a giant fissure between H.R. and liberal editors on the trip, such as Gene Cervi, of the *Rocky Mountain Journal*. Much of it centered around H.R.'s coziness with Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator of the Philippines. "H.R. had more deals going there and in Taiwan than Carter had liver pills," Blum said.

In 1970, H.R. invited me to speak to a state conference of high school journalism students. Aware of what was happening at

SIU, I urged the students to join the establishment and work to change it from the inside, rather than throw rocks and burn down buildings from the outside. I was H.R.'s houseguest and he was furious with my message to them.

We also clashed that same week over an SIU scholarship panel on which he had put me, along with editors from the St. Louis newspapers. The finalist was almost too good to be true. His father was a crippled ex-miner on a pension. The kid's grades were superior. He played varsity football. For all I knew, he also played the violin.

H.R. advised him to take a teacher's regent scholarship for the first two years, even though he had no interest in teaching. One on one with H.R. later, I berated him with, "No wonder these kids blow up buildings. You just told him to lie." His response to me: "The teachers don't care about their scholarship. In two years, he can switch over to journalism and get our scholarship."

That was the bad end of an intense 10-year friendship.

In 1970, an alternative campus newspaper to the *Daily Egyptian* broke the story of the cost of a new stone mansion Morris was building for himself with university research funds. He was using the university physical plant to erect his house without a specific contract. He said the price would be \$250,000. It turned out to be \$898,496.51 in university research funds. The house would include five bedrooms, each with a bathroom, on 32.5 acres of property that needed extra utility lines. W. Clement Stone, the Chicago philanthropist and founder of Combined Insurance Companies of America, came to Morris' rescue when the scandal broke by writing him a check for \$1 million. Morris, H.R.'s good friend and educational godfather, resigned on Aug. 31, 1970.

SIU was in turmoil. At one point it had an interim president, an interim dean of the School of Communications and an acting chairman of the School of Journalism. A newly hired dean of the School of Communications came on the campus, looked around and resigned the same week before he actually stepped into the job.

Long was stripped of his deanship of the School of Journalism, and no longer ran the *Daily Egyptian*. He was still in charge of *Grassroots Editor*, because it was an organ of the conference and not the university. We came to Pere Marquette State Park in the summer of 1974 suspecting that SIU no longer wanted us and wondering if ISWNE

was about to sound a death rattle. We had never known another home but SIU and another secretary-treasurer but H.R. Long. It was an acrimonious four-day conference. Some of us had learned that for years H.R. had been using Reader's Digest Foundation money to help finance the conference. The foundation was supposed to fund SIU journalism students so they could get writing experience on travel research projects. One long-time ISWNE member told me that it was our fault for letting H.R. run everything as secretary-treasurer and never bothering over the years to ask any questions. I agreed with him.

At a general meeting of all members, H.R. and I, a board member, heatedly clashed on stage. I demanded to know where he would now get the money to continue to finance ISWNE. He said he had a secret fund of \$10,000 in a St. Louis bank but refused to say where it came from. The general membership vote came down to whether to let H.R. stay in charge of ISWNE or take it out of his hands and try and find another university and secretary-treasurer to wrap their arms around us.

Our anti-Long side lost big — I think we got four votes out some 30 or 40. That night, one of the old-time ISWNE members accused me of treacherously turning against H.R. H.R. was still loved by almost all of the members.

H.R. took off for a vacation in Hawaii that Thursday, confident that he still ran ISWNE. At the final Friday morning board meeting, it was a fait accompli until we heard from Don Heckey. He wasn't even on the board's agenda, but asked to speak to us.

Heckey, an SIU journalism alumnus whom Long had installed in the president's office in the days of Delyte Morris, had survived all the campus turmoil and was still there. He stunned us at the meeting when he told us that he had a message from the president: the university wanted nothing whatsoever to do with Long or the conference. His surprise appearance completely turned the board vote around, and ISWNE severed all ties with H.R.

ISWNE'S future looked bleak. At that point, I had started for Williams Press three twice-weeklies, the *Star-Tribunes*, out of Tinley Park, Ill., and was hiring graduates mainly from Northern Illinois University. NIU had stayed out of the university money wars in the Springfield legislature while it quietly built a department of journalism that did a great job in supplying students for community-oriented weeklies such as ours.

With ISWNE's permission, I contacted one of their faculty, Dr. John De Mott, to find out if NIU was interested in housing ISWNE. De Mott and I had created a successful NIU journalism graduate program for our staffers in the *Chicago Heights Star* newsroom, with the publisher picking up all of the tuitions as "another company benefit."

De Mott recently recalled: "I hadn't attended a conference but I read *Grassroots Editor*. You asked about summer facilities and I invited you to the 'Eagle's Nest,' NIU's outdoor Lorado Taft Field Campus. The Northern Illinois Newspaper Association, established by NIU, held activities there. The main assembly hall looked out over the valley. It seemed to me that it would make an ideal new summer home for ISWNE."

De Mott remembers meeting with Don Brod, the acting director of the Department of Journalism, and Larry Sill, the associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, in Sill's office. "All I knew at the time was that ISWNE was interested in relocating and that there was some unpleasantness between the conference and the school," De Mott recently told me.

De Mott and Brod asked Sill for permission to provide a new home for ISWNE. De Mott said it dawned on him that the dean thought ISWNE was something like the Illinois Press Association where "a bunch of newspaper publishers got together and talked about how they could reduce the cost of printing and get a better arrangement with the postal service."

De Mott informed Sill that "ISWNE was the intelligentsia of weekly newspapers. These were people who got together and talked about public affairs, what's happening in the world and how they can make their newspapers better from the standpoint of their editorials, not their businesses."

De Mott further recalls the dean's spontaneous positive reaction. "From that point on, Sill was for it," De Mott said. "It became Don's job to work out the administrative details. I was active in arranging the first conference at Eagle's Nest in 1975."

M.J. Schneider, of the *Boyertown* (Pa.) *Area Times*, was elected president of ISWNE at the 1974 conference. In a 1975 "Report from the President" to the general membership, she wrote: "The board had struggled with the SIU problem for two years. We had concluded that ISWNE did not have a big enough financial base to establish ourselves as an independent society.

"A big question faced us: would ISWNE survive a move? We still needed university sponsorship. But, at the same time, we wanted to know what specific commitment SIU could make to our future. We organized our proposals at the 1974 summer conference and sent them to SIU.

"J.K. Leasure, SIU vice president for academic affairs, replied in November 1974: 'There is no interest at the School of Journalism in the Society, and there is no interest in continuing to edit *Grassroots Editor*. No one on the faculty has a great desire to serve as the Society's business manager, and no one could really be relieved of other duties to serve if there was such interest. Further, the department has no faculty vacancies and feels that these duties should not be entrusted to a graduate assistant.'

"Based on the SIU reply, the ISWNE board felt it was necessary to look elsewhere for university support. Learning that the Journalism Department of Northern Illinois University was interested in sponsoring our society, five board members met for a weekend in Don Brod's DeKalb, Ill., living room. They included Garrett Ray, ISWNE vice president, the *Littleton* (Colo.) *Independent*; Bill Rannie, the *Lincoln* (Beamsville, Ont.) *Express*, Rick Friedman, of the *Tinley Park Star-Tribune*, Wendell Crow, of SIU, who had succeeded H.R. as ISWNE executive secretary, and myself."

Brod, however, doesn't recall Crow attending the weekend meeting. "In fact, I don't think I have ever met Crow," he said.

On Dec. 20, 1974, M.J. received word from Brod that the university had accepted the ISWNE sponsorship. NIU's Dr. Irvan Kummerfeldt was appointed secretary-treasurer of ISWNE. Cliff Lawhorne from the University of Arkansas was still editing *Grassroots Editor*. I became acting editor until NIU could name a faculty member to take over the job. Don Brod took on a long tenure as ISWNE executive secretary from 1981 to 1992, when he retired. John De Mott was on the committee that drafted the first Cervi Award for public service.

At Don Brod's retirement as ISWNE'S executive secretary, M.J. composed a reflective letter to the 1992 conference: "I can still see us sitting around that u-shaped table in the Pere Marquette State Park meeting room. H.R. pleaded with us not to move. He said he would find some money somewhere. The ISWNE was his baby, the creation of his brilliant mind and talented determination. It had attracted a heady

assortment of weekly editors: Hous Waring, Gene Cervi, Hazel Brannon Smith, Henry Beetle Hough, Penn Jones, Blair Macy, Foster Russell of Canada, Liam Bergin of Ireland, David Greenslade of England.

"All our flights into Chicago [for the first 1975 NIU meeting] had arrived on time, and we found each other easily — good omens, I thought. Rick Friedman met us at O'Hare Airport. When we followed Rick to the parking garage, he couldn't remember where he had parked his car. We spent a half-hour searching for it. My apprehensions surfaced.

"In Don Brod's living room, we began to plan for Lorado Taft in 1975. The evening was one of laughter, hope and confidence for the future. I went back to Pennsylvania encouraged by that meeting.

"When we held our first ISWNE conference at Lorado Taft in 1975, it was in a new location, on a different month from the past. I wondered if anyone would attend. When I saw the attendance list, I suddenly realized what we all knew: that ISWNE has its own intrinsic values and its own importance, separate from external circumstances."

The 1975 summer conference was held the week of June-15-20 at the Lorado Taft campus. H.R. Long's incredible contributions to weekly journalism showed up in the living, breathing bodies of five former winners of the Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award for Courage in Journalism. It was the award he had established at SIU in 1956, one that would become the Pulitzer Prize of weekly journalism. The five were Hazel Brannon Smith, of the *Lexington* (Miss.) *Advertiser*; Dan Hicks Jr. of the *Madison* (Tenn.) *Monroe County Democrat*; W. Penn Jones Jr., the *Midlothian* (Tex.) *Mirror*; J.R. Freeman, the *Frederick* (Colo.) *Farmer and Miner*; and Foster Russell, the *Cobourg* (Ont.) *Sentinel-Star*.

H.R., retired from SIU, showed up on the afternoon that the five participated in a "Courage in Journalism" panel discussion. He stayed overnight out of the way and was gone the next morning without saying goodbye to the conference. It was the last time he ever put in an appearance at ISWNE.

*Rick Friedman, columnist for the Woburn (Mass.) Daily Times-Chronicle, in 1976 was president of ISWNE when it went to England, Ireland and Scotland. He has been a member of ISWNE since 1969.*



## *H.R. Long's crusty personality and stubborn streak provided a real-world experience for SIU students*

By Dave Ambrose

I was fascinated by Ann R. Paddon's profile of the late Howard Rusk Long in the Winter 2001 issue of *Grassroots Editor*. Having graduated from Southern Illinois University in 1974 with a degree in journalism, I was familiar with "H.R." and, after reading Paddon's piece, felt compelled to contribute a few of my own recollections of this sometimes enigmatic man.

The portrait used to illustrate your story fairly captures the personality Long liked to project. He could be curmudgeonly, arbitrary and iron-fisted. But, I would suggest that much of his "Missouri mule" bluster was a calculated "act" designed to get things done quickly and get them done the way he wanted. The man engendered fear in virtually everyone with whom he dealt.

I would not be so presumptuous as to claim I enjoyed any kind of special relationship with H.R., but I do believe he sometimes confided things to me that he would not have discussed with other students or his contemporaries. I have no delusions about H.R.'s confidence in me as a student or his faith in me as a future journalist. But, he enjoyed having me around in much the same way a high school teacher may be fond of the class clown. His co-workers and subordinates tended to avoid him because they were genuinely afraid of him. Part of the access I had to him while I was a student, I believe, may have been because I was never smart enough to be afraid of him.

His nickname for me while I was at Carbondale (1970-74) was "Spook." Several years after I

was graduated and H.R. had finally, officially and unequivocally retired, I ran into him. "Spook," he told me, "there were times when you were the only thing that helped me keep my sanity."

He was referring, of course, to those tumultuous years in the mid-1970s that Paddon recounts in her article. But before I get to that, allow me to reminisce.

I first met H.R. Long in 1970 shortly after arriving on the Carbondale campus. At that time, SIU operated on a quarter system while the rest of the civilized academic world was on semesters. As a consequence, the academic year at SIU started a few weeks before the academic year on other Illinois campuses. I was already on campus and ready to start classes when I received a letter from the University of Illinois offering me a scholarship in agriculture communications. Since it had been the reputation of the SIU School of Journalism that had drawn me to Carbondale in the first place, I was reluctant to pack my bags and shift direction.

I conceived a bold plan. I went to H.R.'s office and camped out in the reception area until he agreed to see me. True to his reputation, he was gruff and stern, and wanted to know why I was wasting his time. I explained my situation and concluded by telling him, "I really wanted to stay here, but to do that, I need a job." He thought the matter over for a moment and sized me up from behind his desk. Finally, he said, "Come with me." He seemed like an emperor as he escorted me to the offices of the *Daily Egyptian* and introduced me to Bill Eppenheimer, the *DE*'s business manager.

"This is Dave Ambrose," H.R. said bluntly. "Find him a job."

For the next three years I worked in the back shop of the *DE*, doing typesetting, paste-up and ad design. What seemed a godsend in 1970, however, seemed to be a liability when I finally was able to start taking journalism classes. Several of my classmates won spots on the *DE* news desk, while I continued to languish in the back shop.

This was about the time H.R. was reluctantly being eased out of the directorship. One of the things that is missing from Paddon's article is that the editor's position Long assumed at the *DE* was one he created immediately before "retiring" from his position as director of the School of Journalism. The formal title was "Editor Emeritus" and no one really knew what that meant. I have a vague recollection of Managing Editor Bill Harmon wondering aloud about "what in the hell is an Editor Emeritus?"

Essentially, Long announced his retirement from one position and simply moved his books, papers and personal effects across the hall to assume another. Unfortunately, what would have been seen as a politically astute and sly maneuver a decade earlier was perceived as sinister and manipulative in the politically volatile mid-70s. In some ways, Long had created a position for himself where he wielded considerably more power than he had formerly had as director of the school.

It's entirely true that he could be arbitrary and unpredictable as the imperial editor of the *DE*. By the time he became "Editor Emeritus," I had secured a spot on the *DE* staff as editor of a

“Town and Gown” edition. I frankly don’t remember if H.R. had anything to do with my transition from the back shop to the front shop, but it wouldn’t surprise me if he did. In my position, I reported to a clergyman Long had imported for a sabbatical from Ireland. Unfortunately, I cannot remember the man’s name (at the ripe old age of 49, my memory is not what it once was, I guess).

I think I can illustrate the difficulty of working with H.R. with two incidents from my personal experience. One week, I had written a feature story about a pair of elderly women who operated the hot metal weekly newspaper where I worked during the summers and during breaks from school. H.R. liked the story and decided to publish it in a Saturday edition. I happened to be in the back shop when I noticed the negative for the feature page while it was being opaqued on a light table. It was illustrated with a photograph of two elderly women who apparently operated a newspaper somewhere, but they weren’t the women I worked for. I called the error to the attention of the editor and told him I had a photograph of the real subjects of the story that would fit into the hole. He made a hasty phone call to H.R. Long.

As it turned out, H.R. had supplied the erroneous photograph himself, convinced the two matrons in the picture were the same ones I had written about. He was incensed that anyone would question his judgment and ordered the entire story pulled and replaced before the issue went to press. My story never again saw the light of day. That was one side of H.R. Long.

Here is the other.

Since he controlled the content of the *DE*, H.R. took on the editorial page as his personal domain. For one issue, he commissioned an editorial cartoon depicting the *Southern Illinoisan*, then owned by Lindsay-Schwab newspapers, as a giant octopus gobbling up smaller newspapers in southern Illinois. The caption was something to the effect of: “Now, if I can just get my hands on the *Daily Egyptian*.”

I thought the point of the cartoon was rendered ridiculous by the caption since no reasonable person would believe a privately held newspaper chain could possibly acquire a teaching newspaper that essentially was owned by taxpayers. I also thought the cartoon might be questionable since Lindsay Schwab had contributed scads of money to the SIU School of Journalism. Long, of course, had a legitimate concern about independent newspapers being driven out of business by large chains, a trend that he saw as a threat to open discussion and independent viewpoints. But the cartoon did not make the point he wanted to make.

And, I told him so. In a letter to the editor.

Other students on the *DE* staff told me I had made a fatal error, that no one disagreed with H.R. on anything, that H.R. would never publish a letter to the editor from a news desk staffer, and that ultimately I would be fired for being so brazen. Within a day or so, Long came to the door of his office which overlooked the newsroom and silently wagged his finger to beckon me. My friends were sure my hour of judgment had come.

I entered Long’s office and he sternly told me to shut the door and sit down. We discussed the letter for the better part of a half hour. When we finished, he asked me if I still wanted to stand by its content. I told him I did, and then braced myself for the axe to fall. “All right,” he said quietly, “we’ll publish it.”

If I may, I would like to add another perspective to the controversy over the letter to the editor that Long spiked regarding the activities of University President David Derge and Long’s alleged efforts to subsequently influence the committee on operation for the *Daily Egyptian*. From my standpoint, it would be interesting to know the name of the letter writer, for I have frankly forgotten the letter and the ensuing controversy. From what I can remember, however, I believe the writer was a faculty member in the English department who had made a name for himself on campus by avowing to be a Communist. I was enrolled in one of his classes for a quarter and his discussions and lectures on literary topics often were imbued with his ideological rhetoric. It was his custom to wear a beret while teaching his classes, and he often affected the same attire while attending anti-government political rallies. In short, he was kind of a jerk.

Long, of course, was in his prime professionally at a time when Communism was considered a legitimate national threat, which may well have influenced his decision to suppress the letter. At the same time, from what I remember, Long was no great fan of David Derge. To suggest he spiked the letter to protect Derge’s reputation would require a tremendous leap in logic. To my knowledge, the *Egyptian* did nothing to coddle Derge. To the contrary, it routinely criticized the university president, particularly when he oversaw the construction of a palatial presidential residence for himself, complete with a heated driveway, at a time when the university was facing budgetary and staffing cuts. I may be totally wrong on this point, of course, but I don’t believe David Derge was among H.R. Long’s favorite people.

On the other hand, given Long’s sometimes crusty nature, I would not be surprised to learn that he withheld the letter simply because he

considered its author a jackass. If that was indeed the case, the controversy really does appear to be a tempest in a teapot. The First Amendment right to publish is equal to the First Amendment right to not publish. Editors routinely make decisions to spike letters for a variety of reasons. Without debating his motivation, it seems to me that Long’s decision was an appropriate lesson for student journalists who sometimes need to be reminded that the editor is the final authority on what sees print. There is a God. In 1972 at the *Daily Egyptian*, God’s name was H.R.

Since reading Paddon’s piece on Long, I realize now that it was at the height of this controversy that I noticed Long sauntering into the *DE* office one day. He seemed particularly morose and perhaps a little more sullen than usual. I asked him what was wrong.

“They’re trying to get me out,” he told me candidly. “They’re trying to dig up some dirt on me.” “Are they going to find anything?” I asked. “If they go back far enough,” he chuckled, “they’ll find out that I once went skinny dipping with the neighbor girl when I was a kid in Missouri.”

At the time, I was under the impression that he was being leaned upon by Derge to resign. But it may be that he was referring to the committee on operation and others on the faculty in the School of Journalism.

Long’s tactics may have grated on the sensibilities of faculty members and students alike. But his crusty personality and his stubborn streak were probably as good a training as any for journalism students who were likely to encounter editors and publishers in the real world who were equally as difficult if not more so.

In my experience, I have never known of a human being who was all bad or all good, all knowing or all incompetent. If his editorial control of the *DE*, his handling of the committee on operation and his handling of a letter to the editor from a political malcontent may have been out of character for Long, but it should not negate his substantial contributions to community journalism and Southern Illinois University. I would hate to see H.R.’s legacy of accomplishment diminished for briefly displaying the human frailties to which we all are subject.

Despite his alleged lapses, I can think of far poorer examples for journalists to emulate than H.R. Long.

*Dave Ambrose is editor and publisher of the Gillespie Area News and a member of ISWNE.*

# Covering a changed America:

## *Pennsylvania newspapers make use of local connections for better stories*

By Eric C. Wise

Reporters call or visit a local expert to dress a national story with local commentary and connect readers to far-off events. It's a formula for localization that one editor reconsidered as he changed the direction of his paper's coverage of the ongoing war on terrorism.

Robert Unger, executive editor of the *Centre Daily Times* in State College, Pa., said "We tapped folks at Penn State who said the same things as national experts." Before long, Unger changed the approach of the paper, using reporting resources to find "truly local stories." Local connections provide more interest than experts who seem to be repeating what readers have already seen on television.

The *Hershey* (Pa.) *Chronicle* found local connections to the Sept. 11 attacks in its community.

One Hershey High School graduate provided his account of escaping the World Trade Center. The paper wrote about a second Hershey graduate — one of the pilots whose plane was hijacked on Sept. 11.

Another paper, the *York* (Pa.) *Daily Record*, found a connection to Osama bin Laden. The paper interviewed a woman who had once cut bin Laden's hair.

The Sept. 11 attacks boosted sales of newspapers dramatically. The *Reading* (Pa.) *Eagle's* Sept. 11 edition sold about 10,000 copies more than its usual 18,000 afternoon circulation, according to Editor Harry Deitz Jr. The following day, between *The Reading Times* and the afternoon *Eagle*, readers bought about 27,000 more newspapers than the typical combined circulation of 68,047. The dramatic increase over the first week following the terrorist attacks was typical at many newspapers statewide, as was the decrease over the following weeks.

In the October edition of *Press*, Ernie Schreiber, editor of the *Lancaster* (Pa.) *New Era*, wrote that newspapers won respect of thousands of readers. The November issue of *American Journalism Review* reported that in a Pew Research



Center Study conducted Sept. 13-17, 89 percent of respondents thought the media had done a good or excellent job of covering the Sept. 11 attacks. Editors are facing the challenge of keeping readers interested by providing a good depth of coverage and by covering stories not found elsewhere.

How did Pennsylvania newspapers connect the events to readers? The *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a section, "The Ones We Lost" in tribute to 52 local victims of the Sept. 11 attack. The special section is prominently displayed on the paper's Web site, philly.com. Online, "The Ones We Lost" features a photo and brief description of each victim, with a link to a longer profile. Most of the victims were killed at the World Trade Center, although there are some connections to people in the Pentagon and Flight 93, which crashed in western Pennsylvania. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* put faces and stories to each passenger of Flight 93. The *Post-Gazette* took the Flight 93 crash and made it personal. "We felt it

was the *Post-Gazette's* responsibility to tell the story of every individual aboard Flight 93," said Maddy Ross, managing editor at the *Post-Gazette*, in a news release about the project. *Post-Gazette* reporters wrote about every person on the flight. The people on the flight were not locals — a few Californians and New Yorkers, one Hawaiian, and natives of New Zealand and Japan were among those on board — but the paper went beyond the early reports of mobile phone calls from the jet and reports of passengers fighting back. One passenger is described as a successful businessman who was gay and Republican and enjoyed rugby. Another was a businessman with a great memory who liked to drive his BMW convertible and was an incorrigible pack-a-day smoker.

Both *The Inquirer* and the *Post-Gazette's* profiles showed readers that the tragedy was a personal loss. Between the 44 stories of Flight 93 and the Philadelphia area's 52 victims, readers are likely to find someone a little like themselves or like someone they know. At a community newspaper, finding one local connection does the same thing.

### Changes at 'an intensely local newspaper'

At a newspaper with a local focus, *The Tribune-Democrat* in Johnstown, Pa., Editor David Levine made adjustments to meet the needs of readers. He said local content decreased from 80 percent of the paper's news to about 65 to 70 percent in November and December.

"We have always been an intensely local newspaper," Levine said. In the four to six pages per day devoted to war-related coverage, the *Tribune-Democrat* has produced lots of sidebars with local angles, covering local people with connections to the war, how businesses have been affected, and the effects on the Muslim community.

"I talk to a lot of readers and they want it," said Levine, referring to the coverage of the terrorist attacks and war on terrorism. Other than the local sidebars, Levine relies on The Associated Press, *L.A. Times*, *Washington Post* and Newhouse news services for the national coverage. Over the past few months, Levine said, "The quality of wire services content is magnificent."

Unger said the *Centre Daily Times* allows readers to approach the war coverage from three or four points. "One of the things we do best is good displays with good, strong art," he said. The paper's design makes it easy for readers to get information from glance boxes, digests, "refers" and maps. At the *Times*, Unger relies on Knight Ridder and other wire service copy.

Levine said ongoing coverage of the "New America" spawned by the Sept. 11 attacks and the anthrax attacks is a local story with lots of possibilities. For instance, his paper has reported on security measures at local high schools.

In Middletown, Pa., the weekly *Press and Journal* is keeping tabs on security and threats at Harrisburg International Airport and Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, both within a few minutes of downtown Middletown.

Another effect relates to the millions of dollars raised by various nonprofit organizations following the events of Sept. 11. A recent story from *The Patriot-News*, Harrisburg, reported on lower than usual donations to local fund drives — just a couple months after the incredible generosity shown toward the victims of the terrorist attacks.

### Working with the armed forces

Lt. Col. Chris Cleaver, public affairs officer of the Pennsylvania National Guard at Fort Indiantown Gap, said the military can provide many stories with local angles for newspapers. Regarding homeland security, Cleaver said, "We encourage reporters to visit soldiers at power plants and airports."

Some of the security measures in the community are harder stories to break. Fred Burgess, managing editor at *The Sentinel* in Carlisle, Pa., said the people at the Carlisle Army barracks have held back with some information for national security.

Cleaver said he has worked with the media in covering National Guard relief efforts to New York City. "We have done a lot of missions in New York, transporting equipment and supplies. We flew the media with us on almost every trip." Not only did local newspapers get a story about the National Guard's mission, but Cleaver said many were able to find Pennsylvania connections with others working in the cleanup and aid efforts.

Jeff Warren, editor of the *Press and Journal* in Middletown, Pa., said his paper covered the National Guard at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant and other homeland security stories, but has had less success covering the war in Afghanistan. He said a local Air National Guard Unit has served in Afghanistan, but he didn't have much of a story to work with, first because the military has not talked about it, and secondly because the unit's mission is not as easily explained or accessible as what is shown on television news.

Cleaver said that historically, as a conflict continues, the military information channels become more accessible, and information is easier to obtain. He suggested that community newspapers contact local military installations and ask to be contacted when troops are rotated home. In many cases contacts with soldiers as he suggests lead to personal stories of what they experienced, which is more accessible for readers of community newspapers.

Through its Northeast News Alliance, *The Citizens' Voice*, Wilkes Barre, publishes a regular feature called "Pennsylvania Patriots." Each day, the papers publishes photos of two locals deployed in Operation Enduring Freedom, the operation in Afghanistan. Many papers have found that the easiest way to find information about locals involved in military operations is by publishing a notice asking family members to contact the newspaper.

Mark Bowden, author of *Black Hawk Down* and *Killing Pablo*, said, "Just because a story is old doesn't mean it has been told. As the soldiers from a war return, they will have fascinating stories to tell." Bowden's *Black Hawk Down* — first a 30-part series in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, then a book and now a motion picture — was a project that began three years after the battle.

*Eric Wise is publications director for the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association. In this position he serves as editor of PNA's bi-weekly newsletter, Report, and the tabloid newspaper, Press (published 10 times annually). He is a graduate student at Temple University, where he is pursuing a master's degree in journalism.*

# Panelists urge student involvement in 'relentlessly local' journalism

By Glenn Scott

Tim Waltner thinks collegiate journalism students should experience life's public dramas as directly and vividly as he and his contemporaries do running small-town weeklies.

Speaking to college teachers and graduate students during a March 8 panel discussion on community journalism, Waltner, publisher of the *Freeman* (S.D.) *Courier*, predicted that many students would be impressed by the value that readers place on reporting in communities that larger and less-committed papers and broadcasters overlook.

Waltner, past president of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors (ISWNE), encouraged students to try out community journalism at weeklies and small dailies.

"You will discover," he said, "that it is a powerful experience that might become a career."

Other panelists joined in that call during a presentation at the Southeast Regional Colloquium of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in Gulfport, Miss. They argued that young journalists are limiting their potential and their opportunities when they fix their sights solely on the supposed romance of life on big-city dailies.

Real face-to-face, straightforward journalism, they asserted, is practiced nowhere as earnestly as at smaller papers where reporters and editors live and thrive amid the consequences of their work.

ISWNE member Carol Wilcox, a journal-



Tim Waltner

ism doctoral student at the University of North Carolina, organized and moderated the panel discussion. The panel's topic was, "Community Journalism: All Fluff and No Stuff?" Most speakers assured the few dozen listeners that they would find plenty of important stuff in smaller papers.

As former publisher Jock Lauterer pointed out, weeklies and small dailies can't take the easy way out by filling pages with wire copy and photos. The task of community papers is to record the stories and transactions that affect readers' lives, and those papers flourish exactly because of their



Jock Lauterer

local content, said Lauterer, now the director of the Carolina Community Media Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"In the words of the late, great Charles Kuralt, their mandate is to be relentlessly local," he said.

In keeping with the theme, Lauterer drew a rhetorical distinction between fluff, which he categorized as local filler and flavor, and puff, which he warned against as "shameless shilling for local businesses," thoughtless boosterism or weak-kneed editorial writing. He suggested that the legacy of fine and courageous journalism at smaller papers proves that such stuff wins out.

Patsy Speights, the lively editor of the *Prentiss* (Miss.) *Headlight*, spoke directly to the gathering of professors when she told them, "If I had my way, you would not graduate a single student until [he/she] worked for one semester in a weekly newspaper."

Speights suggested there is no better character training than work on a weekly like hers, where she has learned to "wear hats" in marking off her many roles, sometimes



Patsy Speights

the reporter, sometimes the ad director. Do conflicting pressures make her soft? Speights ticked off examples of her relentless methods, noting that she prints news of all local arrests on a column that runs down the left side of her front page. As an editorial writer, she tries to keep decision-makers honest.

"I try very hard to write an editorial to make them do something," she said.

Panelists spend much of their time debunking notions that the real journalistic action is reserved for the largest metro dailies. ISWNE member Cary Stiff, for example, explained that he and his wife, Carol Wilcox, quit the *Denver Post* in the 1970s to create their own weekly, *The Clear*



Cary Stiff

*Creek Courant*, in Idaho Springs, Colo. The *Post*, said Stiff, had lacked guts. The couple published the *Courant* for 26 years and ran "a whole lot of hard news stories."

Stiff said his paper helped to train many young journalists who moved to larger papers after sharpening their skills and developing sources on the kinds of hard-hitting stories that the *Courant* cultivated.

Bill Reader, a former opinion page editor and now an associate lecturer at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, said big papers aren't necessarily better or more professional than small ones. National awards programs that bestow prestige, he argued, are simply means of rewarding the rich — the papers that can afford lengthy investigations and newsprint-heavy special sections.

In the end, he said, students should seek out opportunities to do good work wherever they exist.

"Your goal should not be the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* or the *Miami Herald*," Reader said. "Your goal should be to be a good journalist. It doesn't matter where you go. You can do good anywhere."

As for compelling stuff, Waltner told the story of a painful but necessary conversation with the parents of a boy named Paul, who accidentally shot and killed his good friend, Woody, on the day of a Super Bowl party. The boys had gone to pick up a pizza and came upon a gun that had been inside a portable cooler. The gun went off.

Waltner knew the families. In fact, his daughter had been nearby. It was a tragic story among friends, one that affected many people in a rural town. And though Waltner knew that his readers would accept a straightforward story, he worried about how the big TV stations and regional dailies might exploit the event.

"Two hours before press time," he recalled, "I got this awful knot in my stomach."

Waltner called Paul's parents and explained that he meant to print Paul's name. It was the kind of consideration that goes with the job at smaller papers. He braced himself for a difficult moment, but the boy's father didn't blame the paper.

"Your responsibility is to print the truth," the publisher remembers the father saying. "And the truth is that Paul shot Woody."

As it turned out, the larger media didn't do a number on Freeman's grief. By the time the weekly's story ran, it was too late for the daily operations to pick up. Paul was not charged in the accident, and Waltner said he has since rebounded emotionally to the point that he helped design the *Courier's* web site.

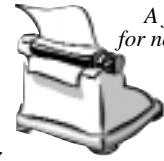
The stuff of an honest ending.

*Glenn Scott is a Park Doctoral Fellow in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*



**Bill Reader**

# grassroots editor



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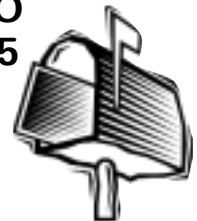
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