
THE REAL NEWS

The Beggar's Banquet

Journalism Honors in the Wake of the Great Media Depression

Charleston, IL (4/09): The decaying asphalt of Interstate 57 was in worse shape than the rotting large animals, a coyote included, that littered the shoulders of the highway. Hard Times in Illinois. A governor, disgraced by an impeachment trial, begged a federal judge to allow him to go to Central American banana republic with no extradition treaty in order to participate in a game show. He was thrown to the curb outside the Direness Federal Building like discarded road kill. As Blagojevich ducks into dark SUV, the reporters that squeezed together on the sidewalk wonder in the back of their minds whether their employer will also kick them to the curb. Hard Times in Journalism.

Bloody Wednesday at the Chicago Tribune had just happened; 53 more news staffers were let go by management. Four "name" sports columnists and reporters were part of this purge. It leaves a sour metallic taste in one's mouth, like a silver filling being pulled from the root with a rusty pliers.

Chicago leads the nation in newspaper bankruptcies: Tribune, the Sun-Times and the Reader. The Daily Herald continues to cut staff salaries to avoid further lay-offs. The financial crisis has magnified the weakness in the advertising markets as everyone begins to hoard cash in ulcer driven anticipation of future underemployment. Some displaced writers have made their way into the Internet "just to keep busy" and to create a working portfolio for the next position when the job market opens back up. Then there are the media vultures who pray on potential free content via displaced reporters who get caught in the undertow of the "new media concepts" being heralded by pundits who in some part has created the circulation declines in traditional media.

Quotes

"Journalism is a kind of profession, or craft, or racket, for people who never wanted to grow up and go out into the real world. If you're a good journalist, what you do is live a lot of things vicariously, and report them to other people who want to live vicariously."

Harry Reasoner

"A newspaper is the lowest thing there is."

Mayor Richard Daley

"The real news is bad news."

Marshall McLuhan

"Our major obligation is not to mistake slogans for solutions."

Edward R. Murrow

"Change is the biggest story in the world today . . . and we are not covering it adequately."

James Reston, in 1963

INSIDE:

THE OFFICE

IN MEMORIAM

A LETTER FROM THE PUB

(C) 2009 Ski/PINDERMEDIA.COM, INC.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED WORLDWIDE

Banquet *continued*

And with that depressing background, people made the sojourn to the flatlands of East Central Illinois to celebrate the accomplishments of one quiet journalism pioneer, Daniel Thorn-burgh.

Dr. Thornburgh is credited with begging, borrowing and cajoling various university administrators into creating from scratch a full major journalism department. And through a single-mindedness, he built a program that continues to funnel turnkey reporters into newsrooms across the nation.

Eastern Illinois had a tradition of “student” newspaper enterprise that dates back to 1913, when a student decided that the school needed a student newspaper. With the help of a local printer, the first News editions were published. The college administration, fearful of independence, later assigned a faculty member to advise the student publication (which at times was code to censor). But there was no formal journalism courses or curriculum at the school until minimal efforts after one of the Great Wars.

The addition of professional faculty added to the friction between student publishing and the administration. Journalism had been treated like the orphan child of the English department until Dr. Thornburgh arrived to develop a program and find the orphan a real home.

J-students went from the flooding basement window wells of old Pemberton Hall where both classes and the newsroom shared space; to a cinderblock outbuilding that was bulldozed for the student union; to the student services building (which we called “the Cave”); to actual classrooms in the Buzzard Building.

Like a cloak and dagger political novel, Thornburgh put together a plan to expand journalism courses and find university support to build a new independent department. It took nearly twenty years to get enough approved courses to create a minor, and almost another decade to get the course catalogue to recognize journalism as a major. Then, in a bull rush maneuver, he got the new journalism department accredited five years later.

MODUS OPERANDI

The Real News was created as a zine in 1980 to keep Eastern News colleagues who had graduated informed on the odd happenings of the news room. In order to keep some form a sanity, the copy desk used to post strange wire copy, weird pictures, humorous captions, post headline goofs, personal graffiti or other potentially libelous materials on a file cabinet in order to keep the campus newspaper out

The Office

When Ski was in college, he used to run around in an Army Jacket that many called his “Office.” It still exists, hanging in retirement in

a closet. It still contains a press pass, a blue pen and No. 2 pencil in the front pockets. It also has a ticket stub from the April 9, 1985 Cubs home opener. It also has an old Amoco hand credit card machine receipt. Among the other small items found include several stale wrapped Wrigley chewing gum sticks.

The Office was a self contained veteran of many campus battles and for the college student on a road trips broadcasting sporting events for WELH or journalism conferences: enough room for notebooks, scratch pads, drawing materials, radio recording equipment, press media guides, occasional provisions and liquid sustenance.

of the apology business. *The Real News* is a continuation of that tradition: from handwritten pages, to copy shopped type, to today’s digital publications. It is a meant to inform, entertain and to avoid all forms of mental therapy. All copy, cartoons, illustrations and graphics are created by Ski, who really does not have that much time on his hands. Caution: Flammable Materials.

Banquet *continued*

The 50th Annual Journalism Banquet honored Dr. Thornburgh as an “icon” for the department. The banquet’s years parallel Thornburgh’s association with the university and his dedication to the program. He was honored by the presence of former Governor Jim Edgar, an Illinois House resolution presented by Rep. Bob Flider, a former student, the university’s current president, a past president, and several deans of other university departments. The support from former students and newspaper publishers is also credit to the quality of the program. The department now has 21 student scholarships as a foundation for more than 200 journalism majors.

It is also quite an accomplishment to honor two distinguished alumni at the event. Ray Long, who is the Chicago Tribune’s Springfield bureau chief, and Dave McKinney, who is the Chicago Sun-Times Springfield bureau chief.

The students attending the event were reserved in their assessments of the current journalism marketplace. The consensus was that their game plans were to get experience in many different aspects of journalism: reporting, editing, production, communications and public relations. The more skill

sets based on the foundation of the writing program would make them more marketable upon graduation.

As alumni explained to them, the practical experience and tangible portfolio of their skills will put them on the top of any potential employers resume pile. As Thornburgh always told his students, go to class then work on Eastern News. The practical experience of working in student media continues to put students at a competitive edge in their career paths.

Long stated that he was probably the most optimistic journalist in the room because he still believes journalism will survive in some form; the medium may change, but the journalism standards will continue on to serve their communities. Today, print, radio and television are integrated into a comprehensive field of study at EIU. In no small part, that accomplishment stems from the hard work of past students and the mentoring by their faculty. As Thornburgh stated in his remarks, his guiding philosophy was, “to teach is touch a life forever.” The strong turnout was clear evidence of his lasting accomplishment to his students and the vitality of the journalism department.

IN MEMORIAM



Mark “Rocky” Rogstad, 52, died suddenly on March 23, 2009. He will be greatly missed by his fiancée, family and friends.

He was a assistant pressman and campus radio engineer when he attended Eastern Illinois. He was an educator and technologist. He taught at various schools, including Montana State University and the University of Montana-Western.

He was a man of good humor and strong opinions.

He was a regular contributor, writer, photographer and foil in *The Real News*.

The photo, left, was taken during his last visit to EIU in 2007.

A Letter from the Pub

*The Real News Publisher's Take on
the Weekend's Events*

"Please allow me to introduce myself, I am a man of wealth and taste."

-- *The Rolling Stones,*

"Sympathy for the Devil" from
Beggars' Banquet (1968)

The Stones returned to their blues roots with their 1968 album. Tracks included "Prodigal Son," and "Street Fighting Man," which were fairly good retrospective soundtrack selections for the road trip to Charleston for the journalism department event.

Having graduated with only one active brain cell, I do not recall clearly any prior journalism banquets of my youth. Senior year there was a recollection that we all got dressed up which made someone remark that us news rats "cleaned up pretty well" if given the chance.

Even on the rare Saturday when there is no office work to attend to, the alarm clock still bursts the news radio voices at 5:30 a.m. With the threat of severe thunderstorms complicating the long drive downstate, there was no turning back. With the suit bag in the back seat and the last can of liquid caffeine in the cup holder, mission control executed the point of no return sequence to point the automobile toward the interstate interchange. The radio stations were pre-set for the 215 mile sojourn. Time to rock and roll in the mid

morning to try to time traffic patterns in the Chicago metro area. For the most part it worked, as Route 53 to I-355 was fairly clear of motorists and devoid hungry state troopers.

The strong cross winds of the approaching storm fronts buffeted the car throughout the journey. A 30 mile per hour cross wind makes truck traffic lighter than normal. But as one travels farther south, the road conditions turn from pristine to pot-marked; symbolic of the broken promises and nutty behavior of the state capitol politicians for the past year.

While cruising down Interstate 57, a familiar license plate zips past me; it is Tony Dardano's vehicle. Well, at least I will know one other person at this event, I thought. He did not see me though, as he made no acknowledgment. So I decided to quell the flatland boredom by attempting to fly down the highway in standard F-16 formation.

I lost track of his vehicle when traffic got heavy just before the Mattoon-Charleston exit. By the first stop light on Route 16, he was no where on the horizon.

Because the trip went smoother than expected, without road construction delays, I was ahead of schedule so I went directly to cruise around campus. I parked near O'Brien Stadium and got out into the fine 80 degree summer weather. There was no hint of storms. So I began to walk toward the union when I heard the echo of a sports announcer over a PA. Thinking it could be an old friend, I detoured toward the soccer field. The soccer match had just ended, and the girls softball game had begun. But the PA was over at the old Monier Field,

which is now modeled like a modern Doubleday Field, complete with masonry walls, actual seats instead of surplus metal bleachers, and a real press box (not like the tree house when I used to broadcast EIU baseball games).

The athletic fields had been dramatically upgraded since The Day. Then it occurred to me, with the massive growth of youth sports at the elementary and high school levels, both in and out of school programs, current students now expect this type of facilities. After a half inning, I went past the campus scum pond (which is now called the Lake) to the softball field, which also has a scoreboard, built in bleachers and a press facility. And like the other venue, the stands were full of spectators.

A sunny Saturday afternoon on campus was accented only by the smattering of cheers. But once inside the quads, it is suddenly noticeable how quiet this town really is; there were coeds sunning themselves with notebooks and couples walking cross campus. The only activity was a mass of students waiting outside Coleman Hall for a session to begin (seminar? testing? placement?) The business school was closed "for a private event."

The new art building was completed, with students lounging on a concrete stoop wall like pigeons. The slow pace of campus life reinforced the notion of how cocoon like the academic environment can be as compared to the fast paced doom of the real world's current recessionary centrifuge.

There were student crews wandering doing a spring cleaning of campus. One crew asked me to

A Letter from the Pub

continued

take their picture with their camera outside of Old Main's front doors (which I did).

The main entrance had a large tent, probably for another event. The journalism event was also going to be on campus that evening, in the Student Union. The administration must be grinding out the dimes and quarters by hosting so many events during the school year.

After about 90 minutes of wandering, it was time to check in at the hotel and prep for the reception. Prepping for the reception meant trying to find the Cubs-Cardinals telecast to mentally prepare for the probable Cub-Card arguments that usually plague old friendships.

The game had a late afternoon national telecast start, so by the time I had to leave, the Cubs had been stumbling around in their injury-bad defense funk. So I prepared for the worst.

I decided to blend into the reception by looking like a Nassau casino pit boss. Well, that hardly worked, as Dardano saw me right away. I asked him if he was the one barreling down I-57. He acted like I was a state trooper with a ticket book in my hand. Well, yeah, I never saw you, and well, yeah, really??

He then told me he already had a story to tell. When Tony arrived, he made his way to DT to say hello. He thought DT said to him "you've come a long way." But that was not what he had really said to him. Lest

we say, it was really like dropping a weight on your foot.

Herb Meeker was present as the only active reporter on the scene. The only reason he could come to the journalism banquet was convincing his editor that you could cover it as a story. So with a notepad in his hand, he looked like he could gather a quote at any time.

Lola McElwee rolled up her portable filing cabinet (a walker). She had broken her ankle and leg in December, and was now preparing to go back for another surgery. This on top of teaching at EIU and taking classes for her PhD at Southern (now mostly by dreadful tele-conference).

There were a few people I had not seen in years, no, decades. Bob Flider was a poli-sci/news guy. He is now a state representative. Ray Long was spotted by the Voice of EIU, Matt Piescinski. Long was on the campus radio station with us when we in school.

Then the first prodigal son appeared, wide eyed and smiling just like walking into Marty's 30 years earlier trying to find his lost newsroom (who were in the midst of one of my Marty's Safari's: watching and drinking away a Cubs-Cardinals game) - - - Tom Keefe!

Then, as the reception portion was filtering out, a second prodigal son appeared in the doorway - - - Marcel Pacatte! Now, we normally find the Northwestern professor in the parking lot of seedy north side motels trying to instill logic into a thirsty sportswriter that the package liquor store has been closed for hours. Marce appeared wide eyed and brimming with a smile, knowing full well that his mere

appearance at this event would resonate with "shock value."

Who else was there? The department had laminated place mats listing all journalism graduates from 1975 to present as a crib sheet. Diane & Scott Weaver, Mike Cowling, Karen Kunz, Ted Gregory (who snuck in late, as I remarked probably waiting for his Tribune paycheck to clear the bank), Andis Robeznieks, Tom Roberts, Dave McKinney and probably I few more I forgot. I did not know there would be a test.

It was good to take stock at this rare of tribal meetings; everyone present seemed to be still employed (but some apprehensive) while others had diverted from straight journalism into corporate communications, technical writing or editing, business, marketing, teaching or public relations. No one was begging for a job leads. But it was also clear that many of the people one expected to attend were probably caught working or stock piling their survival bomb shelters.

Long and McKinney were honored with Journalist of the Year awards. McKinney said they had great stories because we had a "nutty governor" who went beyond the pedestrian corruption of former Governor Ryan. Long was still optimistic about the profession, because society needs good reporting, no matter the medium, because it serves an important public service.

When the student scholarship awards were announced, with the student receiving a 3.93 grade point average, Keefe remarked, "well, I had the point -93 part." Cumulative? I asked.

After the banquet, there was the typical milling about wondering what next to do. It was decided to hold court at Roc's Lounge. However, there was this weird faculty car pool protocol that had to be worked out before the remaindermen left the ball room. But just as we were leaving, the ceremonial pens were passed out, for no real reason. Better late than never, I guess.

For a Saturday night, Roc's bar was relatively quiet as the dinner crowd dispersed into the night. It was easier on the wait staff to corral us in three long tables in the dining room. She asked if this was one check, and immediately I said to open a tab. I have done this before, in fact at this very bar a decade before, so the drink orders flowed freely without the hazard of fumbling for change. In the end, they were surprised when no contributions were requested for

the tab. That's how I decided to roll that night.

Reed wanted to walk though with one beer and leave, but suddenly a second stout landed in his hands, so he consumed it against his will. The faculty wanted to head over to a student party, which sounds just as dangerous game of chance if there is any underage drinking on the premises. The alums stayed put at the bar and spoke of the old haunts, now closed or torn down.

Pacatte relayed his "Tom Collins" story, where he had been drinking heavily at Sporty's one night waiting for a band to play. He then started dancing, then puking, and wound up face down in a snow drift.

The bartender locked the doors after closing and we drank until 1:25 a.m.. When it was time to leave, Pacatte was gone, like a

Magician. No one saw him leave. Literally, he vanished without a word. Poof.

The next morning, the gathering was at the Coles County Airport restaurant. Meeker was inside as the greeter, parking EIU folks into a side room for breakfast. Later, he got the coffee dispenser and became the java jockey.

I guess the memo said it was hawaiian shirt morning as Reed, Meeker and Dardano had their colors on (come to think of it, maybe it some sort of cornfield gang symbol.)

After an hour and half breakfast laughter, it was time to sew the two brain hemispheres back together with the loudest rock bass on the radio during the three hour race back to the Northwest suburbs.

PEOPLE'S EXHIBIT NO. 1



(Left to Right): Lola McElwee, professor and doctor(ate) candidate; Tom Keefe, communications and VW automobile advocate; Tony Dardano, international label magnet; Paul Pinderski, Real News bails bondman; and Ted Gregory, in journalism protection program after winning Pulitzer Prize.