

Jan 5 2010

Les,

Regarding my 1968 campaign narrative, I sent a copy to the Morse collection at the U of O. They filed it and gave it an index number so at least theoretically it's out there for any future researcher to run across. The Historical Society Quarterly was willing to publish it, with editorial changes I probably could have made, but I got the feeling that the editor was accountable to a committee and I didn't see a happy ending if I got involved with them. I wouldn't mind seeing it published somewhere, though, and if you have any thoughts I'd be glad to hear them. I think it's a lost cause, though.

About the enclosed... Ten or fifteen years ago I began noodling around with some memoir material, mainly just for my own entertainment. One of these chapters deals with my own bad headline-writing job (and much worse). The other one is about the Oregonian circa 1964 when apparently our paths almost crossed. It might bring back some memories for you.

I thought Morse's run against Hatfield in '72 was unconscionable. Hatfield helped him in 1968, at least in the primary. He steered me to Gerry Frank, who offered me everything they had on Duncan from the '66 campaign. We didn't use any of it but the offer was made. I still remember Hatfield, in his DC office, holding up his thumb and index finger pressed together in front of his face and saying, "You've got to beat that son of a bitch." Strong words from Saint Mark. The thing was, Morse couldn't stand to leave the Senate. Remember the recount campaign he tried in 1968? That was a sham and everybody knew it--I wasn't involved in it myself--but Morse thought if he could get the election put before the Senate, they would vote to seat him. Talk about delusions.

I had the feeling that in '74 he would have beaten Packwood. No data, just an impression. I think buyer's remorse would have played a part. We traded Morse in for this guy?

I've got to think over your belief that we're headed for fascism. I'm more inclined to think anarchy, but you've got a point.

Happy new year to you and Sue.

Rm

2. The Cop Shop

I wanted to become a reporter in Oregon in the worst way so I went to work at the Oregonian. That certainly turned out to be the worst way. It happened as follows:

In 1964 I was employed as the editor of a weekly newspaper in Oak Harbor, Washington. Oak Harbor was a small town on Whidbey Island in Puget Sound. I didn't belong in Oak Harbor and I wanted badly to get off the island and get on with my life. A problem, however, was that newspaper reporting jobs were hard to come by at the time. So I wrote a letter.

I wrote to John Hulteng, a former journalism professor of mine at the University of Oregon, and told him I wanted to return to Oregon. Did he know of a job opening anywhere? I told him I was desperate and would take anything. He wrote back and said there was an opening at the Portland Oregonian. He said the man to contact was the managing editor, Robert Notson.

I wrote to Mr. Notson telling him of my circumstances and applying for a job. He replied with a two-sentence letter. The first sentence acknowledged receipt of my letter. The second sentence said, "Your salary demands are entirely out of line with any pay scale I'm familiar with for a person of your limited experience."

I should have ended it right there but, as I said, I was desperate. I wrote back to Mr. Notson and said I wasn't making any salary demands, I was merely describing my situation. I said I was the entire editorial staff of the News-Times, which meant I was the editor and the reporter and the photographer and the proofreader and the layout man. I said I was working a fifty-hour week and for that reason they were paying me a salary of \$135. I asked Mr. Notson to reconsider his decision. I told him I would accept any salary he deemed appropriate at the Oregonian.

He wrote back another short letter. He said I was hired at \$118 a week and that I should report for work on Monday, June 8, to the city editor, Richard Nokes.

I couldn't get out of Oak Harbor fast enough. I gave two weeks' notice at the News-Times, served out my sentence there and left the island. Soon afterwards the morning of June 8 found me in downtown Portland walking through the front

door of the Oregonian building wearing a suit and a tie and a shoeshine and a haircut and, truth be told, with my heart in my throat. I'd never worked on a big-city daily before, nor had I ever been in Portland before except to drive through it a couple of times on my way to somewhere else. I hadn't even been told what time of day to report for work. Nine a.m. seemed reasonable, though, so that's what I chose. I rode the elevator up to the second floor of the Oregonian building, crossed a hallway and entered the city room. The city room was a large, brightly-lighted, high-ceilinged bullpen half a block long with rows of desks lined up all the way to the far wall. People were seated at some of the desks or moving about, almost all of them men wearing ties and white shirts, and the feeling I got was a sense of entropy, of energy running down, of not enough activity in the room to fill the space. The city desk was at the front of the room near the entry door and it was there that I presented myself and asked for Richard Nokes.

He wasn't available. I was informed that Monday was his day off. The person sitting at the desk telling me this was a young man who identified himself as Bill Sanderson. I told him I was supposed to be starting work that day and he seemed to think that was my problem, not his. "I guess you'd better get up to Personnel and go through the hoops then," he said.

I asked him where Personnel was. I don't think it gets ahead of the story if I mention here that in the six months I was to remain at the Oregonian I never did meet Mr. Notson. I used to catch a glimpse of him from time to time, though. I call him Mr. Notson because he didn't look like a man who had a first name, or at least not one that anybody would use. He was pale and middle-aged and austere-looking and usually sat alone at his desk at a far corner of the city room. He seemed to spend a lot of time paring his fingernails.

That first morning, after I finished filling out forms at Personnel, I returned to the city desk. Bill Sanderson wasn't there anymore. Another young man named Larry Hildebrand was. Hildebrand told me he was the acting city editor for the day and that he had an assignment for me. I was to go cover a press conference at the Lloyd Center Sheraton. I asked him for details and he told me that one of the staff photographers, Leonard Bacon, had the information. I asked him where I could find Leonard Bacon. He said in the photographers' room. I asked him where that was.

The photographers at the Oregonian had their own little fiefdom. It was in a small cluster of rooms separated from the city room by a short hallway. I went back there and asked for Leonard Bacon. He turned out to be another man of about my age. He was a friendly type who seemed to find me amusing.

I asked him what the press conference I was supposed to cover was about and he gave me a handout to read. I told him I didn't know where the Sheraton Hotel was and he said not to worry, he'd be driving us there. I asked him how long it would take to get there and he said not long. I asked him when we'd be leaving and he said soon. I asked him if there was anything else I needed to know and he took a step backwards and looked me over.

"You're not going to last long here," he said.

"Why not?"

He smiled. "You ask too many questions. People here don't ask questions."

Almost four decades later and I remember that conversation verbatim. Some welcome I was getting at the Oregonian. It wasn't over yet, either. The press conference, when we got to the Sheraton, turned out to be a no-brainer. Strictly a puff piece. It was what we called a news-feature story, meaning there was no news in it to speak of and so you had to dress it up to make it sound interesting. In this case the news hook (no pun intended) was a man named Harold Russell. Harold Russell was a World War Two veteran who'd lost both of his hands in combat and was fitted up with prosthetic appliances. In 1946 he'd won an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role in the movie The Best Years of Our Lives. He was now a spokesman for an organization working on behalf of hiring the handicapped, to use the vocabulary of the time, and that's all the press conference was about. Essentially it was just an announcement.

Bacon and I got back to the Oregonian a little after noon and I told Hildebrand, the acting city editor, what I had. He gave me a look as if to say Why are you bothering me with this? I explained to him that I needed to know how long a story to write.

"As long as it takes to tell it," he said.

"What deadline am I writing for?" I asked. "How soon do you need it?"

"As soon as you can finish it," he said.

"Is there a typewriter somewhere I can use?"

I might have been green but I wasn't stupid. I knew that last question wasn't one that I should have had to be asking. Hildebrand pointed at a desk halfway down the city room. It was covered with old newspapers. Presumably a typewriter was

buried under them because Hildebrand told me to clear some space for myself and get to work.

The clock was ticking. I was on deadline. No time to rewrite or get fancy. I wrote a story about eight inches long and had it on Hildebrand's desk in probably ten minutes. Then I sat quietly at the desk and waited for my next assignment.

There was no next assignment. There was no more anything that day except for sometime later in the afternoon when a reporter crossed the room, sat down at the desk next to mine and introduced herself as Velma Clyde. She asked me in a friendly, somewhat maternal manner if I worked at the newspaper. I said I did and she said, "You mustn't think people here are unfriendly. It's just that they're waiting to find out who you are. The last person who used that desk was a college student who sneaked in for three days to type a term paper."

I continued sitting at the desk until 6 p.m. and then went home. And 6 p.m., it turned out, was the actual deadline I had been writing for. Why Hildebrand hadn't informed me of that fact I had no idea. Maybe he'd been in a fraternity once and thought you were supposed to haze the freshmen.

When I returned to work the next morning Richard Nokes was on duty and I introduced myself to him. He was on the tall, lanky side but beyond that I didn't form much of an impression. Amiable, however, wasn't a word that would have jumped out at me. I went back to the desk I'd been using the day before and there I sat and waited. After a while Nokes sent a copy kid over with a couple of obituaries for me to write. Obits were no sweat. The funeral homes filled out obituary forms and sent them to the newspaper as a matter of routine. All the reporters had to do was to type up the information and put it into sentences and paragraphs.

And that was it for my second day on the job. I couldn't even pretend to look busy. I had nothing to pretend with. I just sat. On the third day Nokes sent me over to the police station and it was there that I commenced to waste the next six months of my life.

The Portland police station was in an aging building at Second and Oak, about a half-mile distant from the Oregonian. On the ground floor there was a press room, a dreary tomb with no windows to the outside. It was painted institutional green. The Oregonian had a desk in the press room, as did the Oregon Journal and the Portland Reporter. At the Oregonian's desk there was a teletype machine, for transmitting our stories to the newsroom, and there were also a police radio and a county sheriff's radio and a fire department radio. The radios chattered away pretty much most of the time, the dispatchers talking on one end and the men in the patrol

cars on the other. There was also a couch in the press room and I wish now I'd used it more often because for all the useful work I accomplished at the police station I might as well have slept my way through the job.

The Oregonian staffed the cop shop eighteen hours a day. Two nine-hour shifts with lunch breaks. Jack Berry was the primary beat reporter. He worked the day shift. Dick Colby worked nights. Between them they took care of ten shifts a week which, if you do the math, you'll see left four shifts unattended. That was where I came in. With my arrival Ted Mahara was sprung from cop-shop purgatory and sent back to the city room and I became the relief police reporter. It was a place to put the new guy, I suppose, theoretically a way to help him start getting acquainted with the city.

On the other hand maybe it was a way to put the new guy in his place, I don't know. I do know that Wayne Thompson began work at the Oregonian the same day I did, fresh from being a sports reporter for the Atlanta Constitution, and he made a career there. He remained at the Oregonian for almost forty years, progressing to energy reporter, political reporter and finally longtime editorial writer. They didn't send Thompson to the cop shop that June day a long time ago. He was as new on the job as I was and they could have sent him but they didn't. They sent me instead. Why? I think Leonard Bacon had probably put his finger on something: I think somehow it showed that I wasn't an Oregonian kind of guy.

I was told later that the relief police beat had been especially created for a reporter who'd had a sick wife at home. She required round-the-clock care and therefore he needed a schedule that allowed him to be at home as much as possible during normal hours. He'd carved out an oddball shift for himself and apparently it had never been changed after his departure. That was the shift I inherited.

My work week began on Friday. On Friday I had the night shift, which ran from 4:30 p.m. until 1:30 a.m. All that time I was alone in the press room, just me and the radios (the Journal didn't staff the cop shop at night and the Reporter rarely staffed it at all). On Saturday I had the night shift again and then I doubled back on Sunday for the day shift, which began at 7:30 a.m. On Monday I worked another day shift. Then I had Tuesday and Wednesday as my days off. On Thursday I worked general assignment back at the Oregonian newsroom, where I never really became part of the operation because I was only there once a week. Out of sight, out of mind. Never did get a desk of my own.

Jack Berry, the day police reporter, had a strong and somewhat eccentric personality. A counterculturist ahead of

his time, he wasn't cut out to be an Oregonian reporter any more than I was. He wore a thick black mustache when mustaches were still seen as faintly disreputable, at least by the Oregonian. So I grew one, too, and Dick Colby followed suit, being a good sport. Before long somebody posted a photograph in the newsroom. It was of three filthy, mustachioed Wild West degenerates. It looked like a Wanted poster. Our copshop reporters, read the caption.

Growing the mustache was more passive-aggressiveness on my part. I was saying that if they wanted to make me a pariah, then I'd look like one. And a pariah I was. Consider my circumstances: I was a single man, new in town, didn't know a soul. I couldn't go out on the town on weekends to meet people because I worked Friday and Saturday night and all day Sunday. With a schedule like that I couldn't develop any kind of a social life. On top of that, my work didn't give me any satisfaction. I was a terrible police reporter. Nobody ever broke me in on the job, for one thing, and for another I didn't know any cops. I never met any day-shift cops because I didn't work weekdays except for Monday and I never met any night-shift cops because I didn't work week nights except for Friday. I knew there was a jail somewhere in the building but I never saw it. I think there was a city court in the building, too, but I never saw that either. I was so ignorant I couldn't even have said what an arraignment was.

I only learned two things at the cop shop. One, I learned how to operate a teletype machine, and two, I learned how to report traffic accidents without ever being on the scene. Reporting traffic accidents accounted for ninety per cent of my job. If there was a breaking story, and they were rare, maybe a fire once in a while, the Oregonian sent a reporter out from the newsroom to cover it. My only responsibility was to phone the city editor and give him a heads-up, which was usually redundant because they kept their own set of radios in the cityroom.

I was a bit of a free spirit in those days. Refused to own a wristwatch. Didn't approve of letting myself get tied to the tyranny of an arbitrary schedule. I believed you were supposed to eat when you were hungry and sleep when you were sleepy and do what you felt like doing when you felt like doing it. So not owning a wristwatch and, strangely enough, there being no clock in the cop shop, I used to bring my wind-up alarm clock from home with me to work. Also a book to read. It's the nights at the cop shop I remember most. I would drive downtown shortly before what would have been rush hour if Portland had had a rush hour back then. I would find a place to park at the curb, plug the meter until 5 p.m. and go into the cop shop where I'd say hello and goodbye to Jack Berry. I'd put the alarm clock on my desk where I could keep an eye on it and I'd begin my shift.

It was a long, slow nine hours (for lunch, halfway through, I'd walk a block up the street to the Embassy Club where I'd sit at the counter eating a steak sandwich and reading my book). The routine at the cop shop was uncomplicated. Every couple of hours I'd go through the police reports but they seldom turned anything up except maybe a burglary or lost animal once in a while. I'd phone the nearby suburban areas, meaning the Clackamas County and Washington County sheriff's offices, and ask if they had anything happening. They almost never did, and if they did but said they didn't I wouldn't have known I was being stiffed. Once a night I'd check the critical list if we had one. I'd phone whatever hospital was appropriate and ask a patient's condition. If he went from critical to serious I'd scratch him off the list. If he went from critical to dead, that would be a news story but I don't recall ever writing one of those.

The rest of the time I sat and looked at the walls. I learned to listen to the radios with half an ear. Dry, uninflected fragments of conversations. But occasionally an urgent note would creep into the voices and then I'd pay attention. It was over the radio that I'd hear about traffic accidents. Fender-benders didn't make the paper. I'd only report an accident if there was a fatality or an injury or possibly some kind of property damage. My deadline was around midnight and if the accident happened early enough in the evening I could afford to wait until the patrol cops got back to the station and filed their report. I'd take the information from that. But if the accident happened later at night I'd have to work the phone. I'd call the dispatcher and ask him to have the patrol cops phone me with the facts. If that didn't work I could phone the ambulance company and question the drivers. Eventually I would phone a hospital and get the medical information. One way or another I'd pull enough facts together to file a story. Intellectually stimulating, it wasn't. Mainly it was just a pain in the neck because it was deadline work. If an accident happened too late at night to make the paper, I'd leave whatever information I had in a note for the day-shift reporter to follow up on.

Except on Sundays I was the day-shift reporter. In the twenty-four hours between Saturday evening and Sunday evening I spent eighteen of them in the police station. Sundays were the worst shift. Sundays were rock bottom. I would have left work at 1:30 a.m., gone home for all of about four hours' sleep and doubled back to be on the job again at 7:30 a.m. By mid-morning on Sunday the sleep deficit would rise up and just wallop me. And usually nothing happened on Sundays. Sundays were deadly quiet. On Sundays I could have been working in a ghost town. While pyramids were built, while ice ages came and went, while mountain ranges crumbled, I sat in that abandoned tomb of a press room trying to keep my eyes open while I listened to the empty ticking of an alarm clock.

On Sunday, though, I would get some company when one of the Journal reporters showed up. There were two of them, a young guy and an older hand. The young guy was congenial. He considered me a colleague and shared my sense of the absurdity of the job. Not so the older hand, a crusty gent who shared nothing, not even conversation. He thought I was the enemy because I worked for a competing newspaper. Whenever he finished sanding a story through on his teletype he would tear off the dupe (the carbon copy) and ostentatiously lock it in his desk drawer to keep me from getting a look at his big scoop. I might have been impressed if I'd ever seen a story of his in the paper that we didn't already have.

Mondays were more diversionary at the cop shop because at least there were bodies around. A Journal reporter in the press room, people in the hallways, noise and life in the building. On Mondays, too, the man from the Reporter would breeze through. Him I envied. He had a real job. He came in looking for actual news and if he didn't find any he left the building and went somewhere else to find some. He struck me as a police reporter who knew what he was doing. Unlike myself. For all I knew the cops could have been out in the hallway taking payoffs from the Mafia. For all I knew they could have arrested Adolf Eichmann and had him in jail. Never before in my life had I held a job where so little was expected of me and where I delivered so perfectly on the expectations. The highlight of my week came on Monday at 4:30 p.m. when Dick Colby showed up to relieve me and I was able to put the cop shop out of my life for the next three days.

Somewhere in the course of events Bill Sanderson, with whom I'd become friendly, advised me to talk to Dick Nokes. He told me nobody had ever been assigned to the relief police beat for more than a few weeks. He said it was strictly a temporary slot, a holding pattern, well known as not a fit job for a human being, and that Nokes would take me off the shift if I merely reminded him of how long I'd been on it. Others gave me the same advice but I declined it. I said if Nokes didn't care enough to take me off the shift on his own, then he wasn't a man I wanted to talk to about anything. I wasn't about to ask him for any favors.

I was being intransigent, I suppose, but as time passed my situation seemed to earn me a peculiar reputation in the newsroom. Apparently the other reporters came to look on me as some strange amalgam of victim and mascot and clown all rolled up in one. In their eyes I was the eccentric but likeable young man who showed up once a week with footprints all over his back but eager and undaunted. I remained on cordial terms with a lot of the Oregonian reporters in the years that followed. Those same names that would have been familiar to the general public thanks to their bylines in the newspaper,

they were friends of mine. I socialized with them, played poker with them, ran into them in the course of work. Up into the 1970s I was in the habit of dropping by the newsroom from time to time to shoot the breeze or see about picking up a freelance feature assignment for the Sunday magazine. I didn't hold a grudge against the Oregonian. No hard feelings.

No feelings at all, actually. It was as if I'd never even worked there. Looking back, I recall the experience as hardly more than a speed bump while I was on my way to somewhere else. What stayed with me over the years, though, was the initial feeling that had struck me on the first day I walked into the newsroom: that nothing much was happening at the Oregonian, that it was a place where resources were not being put to their best use. I've since come to understand that there are a lot of bad newspapers in the country and in the general run of things I don't think the Oregonian is a bad newspaper. I just don't happen to think it's a very good one. It once had a nickname, the Old Gray Lady of the Willamette, and in my opinion the description was apt.

The Oregonian was not a place where people made waves. The atmosphere in the newsroom reeked with the tacit understanding that the way to get ahead in the organization was by keeping a low profile. You didn't want to be seen as someone who challenged the establishment. And yet there were a handful of reporters who struck me as having an unlikely independence, a kind of imperial presence. I don't think they got that way by playing office politics. I think that in the country of the timid they simply asserted themselves and got away with it. Gerry Pratt, for example, the business editor who later went on to bigger things in the Fred Meyer empire, blithely ran his own show without interference. Likewise Joe Bianco, the freewheeling and affable Sunday magazine editor. Likewise veteran reporter Ann Sullivan, who apparently had carte blanche to write her long, Ann Sullivan-type stories without concern for the heavy editing they usually needed but never received. Likewise Don Holm, the outdoors editor, a prolific freelancer who published a steady stream of books on fishing and such subjects. I never met the man but I held him in awe because he wasn't just a reporter, he produced actual books.

The editorial writers occupied their own private kingdom and as far as I was concerned they were welcome to it. They endorsed Barry Goldwater the year I worked there. The only two editorial writers I remember were Malcolm Bauer and Herb Lundy. I recall sharing an elevator with one or another of them on occasion but not a word ever passed between us, not even a hello. I never met the newspaper's publisher, Mike Frey, and when I left the Oregonian I still hadn't been introduced to Mr. Notson, the man who hired me.

In closing this chapter I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge a few men whose work I respected. I only wish there'd been more of their kind. I tip my hat across the years to reporters Early Deane and Leverett Richards, to staff artist Bruce Dauner, to copy editor Bill Ening and to Bill Sanderson, a good reporter but a remarkable editorial cartoonist. And, as an aside, to Ted Mahar. In one of those flukes of circumstance I ran into Mahar on the street just the other day as I was writing this chapter. We had a brief conversation in the course of which he said, with a half-smile on his face and entirely out of the blue, "You and the Oregonian never were a good fit, were you?"

Thirty-seven years later and he still remembers. I guess it showed. Which reminds me that a couple of years ago I bumped into Dick Colby. We reminisced about the police beat, among other things, and he enjoyed telling me that on my departure I'd posted some kind of defiant, or maybe just ironic, farewell banner on the wall of the cop shop. I have no memory of the incident but it sounds like the kind of stunt I would have pulled back then.

Late in the year of 1964 I was at home on a Tuesday morning when my telephone rang. Donn Bonham, the city editor of the Eugene Register-Guard, was on the other end. I had a job application on file at the Guard and Bonham was calling to say they'd come up with an opening.

"I'll take it," I said.

He laughed. "Don't you even want to know what it is?"

"I'll take whatever it is."

"Well, there's a formality," he said. "You have to interview with the managing editor."

"I can be there in two hours," I said.

He said tomorrow after deadline would do fine. And so the next day I presented myself at the Register-Guard and accepted their job offer. We agreed that since it was so late in the year, the holidays approaching, I would begin work on the first Monday of the new year. I drove back to Portland and the next morning I gave two weeks' notice at the Oregonian. Paul Laartz, the assistant city editor, was working the desk at the time. I liked Laartz. He was one of the good guys. When I gave him my message he looked up from what he was doing and said, "Good luck," then returned to his work without missing a beat.

And those two words were it, my benediction. I wasn't even a ripple in the pond at the Oregonian. I knew, however, that there was one more thing I had to do before I left town and started work in Eugene at what promised to be suitable employment for an adult. I went out and bought a wristwatch.

4. Pacific Palisades

I once worked for Charlie Brown but unfortunately not the cuddly character from the comic strip. My Charlie Brown stood six feet three inches tall and was built like a football linebacker. He also suffered from a serious charisma deficit. He and his brother Bill Brown were the owners and publishers of a weekly newspaper in Pacific Palisades, California. I want to keep this chapter short because I'm writing about Oregon here, not California, but my stint with the Brown brothers began and ended in Oregon so it needs some telling.

The year was 1962. I'd been living in Eugene for four years by then. I was doing some local freelance writing but not enough of it to put any money in the bank and I seemed to have run out my string. I needed to find salaried employment. The journalism school at the U of O maintained a Job Opportunities bulletin board and I saw posted on it a notice that the weekly newspaper in Pacific Palisades was looking for an editor. The pay was more than I could have earned as a first-year man on a daily paper, so that was a plus. As was the appeal of escaping another oncoming Oregon winter. But the job was in California and that was a minus.

I owed a family visit to Los Angeles, though, and I thought I could at least interview with the Palisadian-Post while I was down there and see what the situation looked like. So that's what I did. And what transpired in that interview, I later realized, was peculiar in the extreme. For the Brown brothers had the personalities of sediment. I never once had a conversation with either one of them that wasn't painfully difficult--except for during the job interview. How they rose to the occasion I'll never know but the fact is that they charmed the socks off me.

They were identical twins, for one thing. Looked just alike. They were in their middle or late forties, I judged, with bright blue eyes and high pink complexions and white hair but not much of it. Their voices were soft and despite their size they seemed gentle and restrained, almost timid, their smiles tentative but genuine. Nice guys, I thought, easy to be around and apparently earnest about putting out a quality newspaper. What sold me on the job, though, was the location.

Pacific Palisades was at the westernmost edge of Los Angeles. If you were to drive towards the sea on Sunset Boulevard, once you passed Bel-Air and Brentwood you'd be in Pacific Palisades. Turn right on the Pacific Coast Highway

and your next stop would be Malibu. The boundaries of Pacific Palisades were roughly the Pacific Ocean, Topanga Beach, the Santa Monica mountains and the cities of Beverly Hills and Santa Monica. It was an affluent community situated above the ocean amid tropical foliage and Mediterranean architecture and cloudless blue skies and the air fresh with a marine tang. If you had to pick an area of Los Angeles to live in, assuming you could afford it, Pacific Palisades would be the place you'd pick. So I took the bait.

Big mistake.

I returned to Eugene, closed out my affairs and drove back to Los Angeles with everything I owned crammed into an overloaded Volkswagen Beetle. I got lucky and found an apartment to rent at the mouth of Santa Monica canyon. It was just across Pacific Coast Highway from the beach and only a short uphill drive to the Palisades, where the newspaper occupied a small stucco building with a tile roof and a patch of green lawn in front. It was on a street called Via de la Paz. Street of Peace.

So far, so good, but when I reported for work the first morning I soon realized that something was wrong. Where were the charming Brown brothers? They'd disappeared, never to be seen again, and in their place were a couple of lunks. Bill Brown, it turned out, ran the business side of the newspaper and Charlie Brown ran the editorial side. Charlie showed me to my office, which was a small room with no windows in it. To my front and back were blank walls, to my left and right were closed doors, the floor plan effectively isolating me from human contact. Not a promising sign.

Let me paint the picture here. The Palisadian-Post was a big paper for a weekly. It was a broadsheet, meaning full-size (not a tabloid), and it ran a lot of pages. My memory is dim on the matter but it tells me we probably printed an average of twenty-four pages a week. I was the only full-time editorial employee and it was my job to fill the news hole. That was a lot of words to churn out, especially in view of the fact that there was no news in Pacific Palisades. That was because Pacific Palisades was not an incorporated city, it was merely a Los Angeles neighborhood. Our city hall and county courthouse were twenty miles away in the downtown civic center. The LA Times covered city news, we didn't. We couldn't have even if we'd wanted to. The truth was that we didn't have much of anything to cover. We had to invent things.

There was the high school, okay. That was in our backyard. We didn't have a junior high but we pretended we did by appropriating the one in Brentwood. For a while we

had a local Civic League, a self-starter organization involved in a zoning fight. But our major regular news source--meager pickings, believe me--was the Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce. They met for lunch every week at the Santa Ynez Inn on Sunset Boulevard and Charlie Brown and I attended, Charlie for a write-off lunch and me as a reporter. We always took my car and I never got reimbursed for mileage. If you knew Charlie you would have understood.

We did feature stories. I always kept an ear out for human-interest material. I also rewrote or followed up on stories from the Santa Monica Evening Outlook if they had a local angle. We had an honorary mayor of Pacific Palisades whom we worked into the paper whenever we could but it was a stretch considering that the honorary mayor the year I was there was an alleged movie star named Doug McClure. We also covered the weather, a chronic annoyance of a chore. Attached to the side of the Palisadian-Post building was a maximum-minimum thermometer that had to be checked and re-set every morning, weekends included. That became my obligation, along with writing cover copy to accompany the temperature listings. If you want to work on an ulcer sometime, try writing a different-sounding weather story every week in a place where the weather never changes.

I took the photographs for the paper. Hated it. I happened to own a second-hand reflex camera with which I was marginally incompetent but the Browns preferred that I use the newspaper's camera. The newspaper's camera was a Speed Graphic. A Speed Graphic was a big camera with a bellows on it. It didn't use rolls of film. It used 4x5 plates. It also used a flash gun which was powered by a battery pack I wore strapped over my shoulder. When I went out with the Speed Graphic I felt like a Sherpa setting off for Everest. In my opinion the only people ever compatible with Speed Graphics were photographers from the 1940s nicknamed Scoop.

My darkroom work was pitiful but fortunately Bill Brown recognized this and did a lot of the developing and printing for me. We briefly had a real photographer, though. He was a freelance named Loren, as I recall. The Browns put him on a retainer of I think \$25 a week. Loren was a past president of the Southern California Press Photographers Association and told me he'd only signed on for the pittance he was getting because he thought he could make some business contacts in Pacific Palisades through the newspaper. It was Charlie Brown's view, however, that he'd hired Loren to be on call twenty-four hours a day. Charlie thought it was perfectly appropriate to have me phone Loren and tell him to drive in from downtown and take a mug shot for us. Loren quit the same week he was hired.

After Loren we used a high school student. He was a sweet, kind of nerdy kid who was hoping for a career in photography and had his own darkroom at home. Charlie paid him \$5 a photo but after a couple of weeks the kid told Charlie he was losing money on the job and asked if he could get reimbursed for his darkroom supplies. Charlie blew up, called him a little thief and chased him out of the building. The last I saw of the kid he was running through the lobby as fast as he could with Charlie on his heels swinging a pica stick at him.

Short-term photographers aside, I did have some editorial assistance, namely a part-time society editor. Thank God for her. She gave me somebody normal to talk to in the office. I think the Browns paid her \$50 a week, or maybe \$25, but that was because she didn't need the job. She lived in Pacific Palisades with her husband and son and only worked at the paper because she enjoyed it and could keep her own hours. For a while we had a part-time sports editor who worked for peanuts, too, because he didn't need the job either. He was a young wire-service reporter who worked nights downtown for United Press. He'd grown up in Pacific Palisades and told me he was only working for the Browns because of his mother. She liked seeing her son's byline in the hometown paper.

So that was the staff. Among us we somehow managed to fill the paper every week along with a shopping newspaper the Browns published. The shopper was distributed up the coast as far as Malibu and was a relatively minor matter but we still had to get it out every week and it did add to the workload. Speaking of which, I haven't gotten to the good part yet. I've been saving it until I could say a word or two about the Browns.

They were from Minnesota. But small-town Minnesota. The iron-mining district. I don't know what brought them out west but whatever it was they came to California, bought a weekly paper, supplemented it with a shopper to beef up the advertising revenue, ran a job-printing operation out of the backshop and had themselves a nice respectable little business just like back home on Main Street in Lake Wobegon. In my opinion if they had to settle in California they should have done it in a place like Bakersfield. Or Barstow maybe. Or Paso Robles. But not the gold coast of Los Angeles. Their mind-set was too alien.

An example. In April Charlie had me write a story saying that the local movie theater would have a matinee showing of King of Kings on Easter Sunday. I suggested to him that maybe that wasn't an appropriate item for the news pages. He didn't know what I was talking about. The theater was one

of his advertisers, wasn't it? He ran the story under a four-column headline on the front page and illustrated it with a picture of Jesus. At least he put it below the fold.

Another example. After I'd been with the paper a while I offered to write a humor column. I figured I could cobble it together out of leftovers, bits and pieces that for one reason or another hadn't made it into the paper. I said we could call the column Left at the Post. I thought it was a nifty title but Charlie was appalled. He said he wouldn't print communist propoganda in his newspaper. Only after I convinced him that left at the post was a phrase from the racetrack, not a political statement, did he relent.

And then there was the incident of the new year's baby. The first baby born to a Palisadian couple in the new year was an annual story for the paper. The proud parents of the new arrival were awarded a merchandise package donated by local businesses. This was accompanied by the usual hullabaloo. In 1963, however, the new year's baby was born to a Palisadian family's live-in domestic help. The proud parents were Mexican, that is to say, and therefore deemed ethnically noncompliant with the spirit of the occasion. I didn't even try to fight that one; I knew a lost cause when I saw it. The newspaper raised no objection when the prize went to the second baby of the new year, an infant born to "real" Palisadians.

My point here is that in the printing of news stories Charlie Brown held some narrow and small-town opinions. Some of them he backed up with rules, and I've come to the good part now because one of his rules was this: I was not allowed to use passive verbs in the newspaper. Charlie, believing that active verbs were more vigorous than passive verbs, banished all passive verbs from the news columns. Bizarre as that sounds, it was true. And having said that, I don't know how to elaborate on it. All I can say is just try writing enough words to fill an entire newspaper every week without resort to the passive voice. In retrospect I don't know how I did it. All I know is that it was a big pain in the neck. It wasn't even good training. It was just nuts. It also made for some bad writing. The president of the Civic League phoned me once with a complaint. "Every time you write a story about us," he said, "you say we claim sixty-five members. We don't claim sixty-five members. We have sixty-five members. I'll show you the membership roster if you want." It didn't mollify him to be informed that I wasn't allowed to use the word "have" in the newspaper. It was passive.

This gets worse. Another of Charlie's rules was that no news story could begin with the definite or indefinite article. He thought the words "a," "an" and "the" took the

oomph out of a story and therefore he proscribed them from the openings of lead paragraphs. It didn't matter if they might have been appropriate, they were verboten. The Palisadian-Post, needless to say, had a writing style all its own. A weird one.

I'll give Charlie credit for this, though: he put out a good-looking paper. He was meticulous about page layouts. He spent press day in the back shop building the pages, moving stories and headlines and photos around until he achieved exactly the artistic balance he wanted. And that gave rise to another of his rules: the headlines, which it was my job to write, had to count out precisely. This requires an explanation.

We used what were called "drop heads," meaning two-line headlines in which the top line is longer than the bottom line. This was not an uncommon practice. Charlie's refinement, however, was to require that the top line reach from column edge to column edge exactly and the bottom line measure exactly one-and-a-half counts less. Headlines can be written that way but it's excruciating, time-consuming work and nobody but an obsessive maniac would insist on it.

I could go on, but I want to wrap this chapter up. To the best of my knowledge the Browns had never been able to keep an editor for anything like a permanent length of time. I stayed for ten months, which set a record, but it was only inertia that kept me around that long. I'd moved a thousand miles to take the job and I wasn't of a mind to turn around and move back, at least not immediately. But I knew it was only a matter of time. The beach, where I lived, was nice, but every time I drove into town I was reminded of why I'd left Los Angeles in the first place. It wasn't the place where I wanted to make my future. What finally led me to make my break with the Browns was a dream, but it was preceded by a sequence of events that deserves telling.

It began one Wednesday midmorning when Charlie came into my office and invited me out for coffee. This was unprecedented, so completely out of character for him that I couldn't even begin to guess what might have been on his mind. We left the building and drove to a coffee shop where we took a booth and sat looking at each other for fifteen minutes without saying a word. We then returned to the newspaper where Charlie went to his office and I went to mine.

In a few minutes he came into my office again. He tried closing the door behind him but the door wouldn't close, the reason being that it hung crookedly and would swing shut of its own accord. I liked the door open so I'd tied it permanently that way with a piece of string. Charlie, finding that the door wouldn't close, returned to his office.

I got up and untied the string. It seemed like the thing to do since Charlie pretty obviously had something he wanted to get off his chest in private. Sure enough, in five minutes he came back again. This time he closed the door, sat down across from me and began chewing me out. It seemed there'd been a misunderstanding between us, although this was the first I knew anything about it, and Charlie had taken it as a personal affront. He was one of those men who could get angry by the sound of outrage in his own voice and this he proceeded to do. The more he went on, pointing out my many character defects, the angrier he became. I didn't see any profit in arguing with him. I merely heard him out, which didn't cost me anything, and when he finished his tirade I ventured the opinion that we seemed to have been having a communication problem. I said it was helpful that we'd talked it out and I told him that from now on I'd try to do a better job of keeping him informed of things. That seemed to placate him and he left my office. I didn't give the incident further thought. With Charlie it was always something.

The next day, however, Thursday, he came back and closed the door behind him again. "You know," he said, "Bill and I won't be in the office tomorrow." That was true. They were going up to Sacramento for the annual convention of the California Newspaper Publishers Association. "You'll be answering the phone while we're gone," Charlie said, and added awkwardly, "If anyone calls asking about the editor's job, tell them it's not available." He went on to explain that he and Bill had decided to fire me and had placed an ad in Editor & Publisher seeking my replacement. They'd changed their minds about letting me go, however, after our previous day's heart-to-heart and my promise to reform my wicked ways.

None of this meant anything to me. It was just more stuff that came with the territory. But a funny thing happened in Sacramento. In the competition among weekly newspapers the Palisadian-Post won a couple of awards. Big ones. One was for best-looking front page and I forget what the other was for but it was either for overall best-looking weekly or maybe even for best weekly in the state. Whatever the second one was for, it was undeserved but that was beside the point. The Browns won it and they came home from Sacramento on Cloud Nine. They were so happy that they gave me a raise in pay. I thought that was cute. In the course of a weekend I'd been upgraded from has-been to valued employee.

In the Browns' view of the world the awards were banner headline material. They were our big front-page news story of the week. But you need to get the picture here. Because publicity photos had been taken at the awards presentation. California Governor Pat Brown (no relation) had been the

presenter. The photo for the first award showed him handing a big framed certificate to Charlie Brown and the photo for the second award showed him handing a big framed certificate to Bill Brown. Same pose, same background, same-looking certificate. Remember, Bill and Charlie looked just alike. And for the occasion they'd both been wearing their best dress-up Minnesota dark blue suits. At first glance, even at second glance, the two photos were identical. They looked like the governor giving the same award to the same man twice. That didn't bother Charlie. He ran the photos on the front page, side by side and four columns wide each. Damndest front page I ever saw. Your first instinct on seeing it would have been to look for the 3-D glasses to put on. I treasured that front page. Saved it for years. I thought it was a perfect visual summation of my bizarre interlude at the Palisades.

I had a dream soon afterwards. It was so vivid that I remember it to this day. I was in a car, by myself, driving south on Highway 97 towards Klamath Falls. On my right was Klamath Lake, spreading out invitingly in a rich blue, and in the distance ahead the snowy peak of Mount Shasta poked into the skyline. On my left, close to the side of the road, was a field of high-standing cattails so lush and green they could break your heart. That was the dream, hardly more than a quick, sensory flash, but it resonated with emotion because in the dream I felt...liberated. Empty space. Wide open country. Exuberance. Opportunity. The dream was of Oregon, and in its brief duration I felt happier and more exhilarated, more alive, than I'd felt in all my time back in Los Angeles. I awakened from the dream knowing it was time to go home. I gave two weeks' notice that day and when I left the Palisades for Oregon later I never looked back.

But I took something fearless with me. It was the reckless belief that nobody could ever again give me a reporting assignment that I'd be afraid to tackle. Because, guess what, I knew if I wanted to I could tie a ribbon around the job by knocking the whole thing out without using a passive verb. Needless to say, I never felt the urge.