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opinion

Seeing the media's other side

When a student dies in a freak accident it is news. It makes the front page of the *Oregonian*, the *Register Guard* and the *Oregon Daily Emerald*. When it happens to a member of the *Emerald* staff, it is more than a news story to us.

editor's note
sandy johnstone

Ken Kromer's death was a shock to the whole *Emerald* staff. We will miss him. But this experience made me realize something about the media — they are callous.

After Ken's death, we became the interviewees, instead of the interviewers. Reporters from all over the Northwest called to ask us how we felt, what kind of a guy was Ken, what were his interests, did he know much about rafting, how old was he, how long had he been attending the University, why was he on this trip, were we close to him, what did he do on our staff, how did we find out, what was our reaction. . . .

We found out from a UPI reporter. It wasn't easy to hear that kind of news from such an impersonal source. And it got less easy to deal with the media as the day wore on.

They were nosy. They wanted us to open our hearts and talk honestly and openly about Ken and how his death was affecting the staff.

I talked to a woman from the *Boise Statesman*. She was nice enough, asking all of the right questions — all the questions I would have asked if I had been doing the questioning.

I tried to give the right answers. I wanted to convey to her how much Ken meant to me, to all of us. I wanted to tell her how fun he was, how just talking to him could brighten the day. I wanted to explain his enthusiasm for photography and for journalism. I wanted to tell her how much we all loved him.

"He will be missed," I told her, stiffly. I just couldn't open my heart to a voice over the phone, to someone who was impartially typing everything I said into a computer system.

Even more impartial was the *Associated Press* story. I found it on the wire when I was showing a visitor how to use the system. It was such a normal story, written in inverted pyramid form. Ken wasn't mentioned until about the fifth paragraph. I wanted his name written in 72 point type at the top of the page.

As journalism students we are taught how to conduct the "tough interviews." The reporters who talked to us — from several radio and television stations and a half dozen newspapers — were probably on their best behavior. But they didn't understand. They didn't really care. It was just another story to them.

To us, it was more than front page news. And because of this, I think all of us will be better reporters. We know what it is like to answer nosy questions. We will understand how sources are hurting, how they can't just whip out a quick quote because a reporter asks. We will try to convey a sense of caring when interviewing those involved in a tragedy. It is a good lesson to learn. But the price was too high.

Sandy Johnstone is the *Emerald's* managing editor.

letters

Congratulates

In the past I've had occasion to criticize the University library for some of its acquisition policies. Thus I take particular pleasure in being able to congratulate it for its procurement of what promises to be an exciting and invaluable reference collection.

Up in the government documents section of the library there are a set of abstracts and indexes which together comprise the Declassified Documents Quarterly collection. These volumes pull together and summarize in one place tens of thousands of government documents that were prepared by agencies such as the White House, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Council, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Dept., State, and other agencies. The documents became public due to declassification after the 30-year waiting period or were released under Freedom of Information Act requests.

A brief random browsing through one abstract revealed the existence of documents on subjects such as the CIA's drug

experimentation on human subjects to the Joint Chiefs of Staff's discussion of U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1958. All documents listed in the references are contained on microfiche nearby.

Anyone seriously interested in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy in the post WWII era will want to consult this collection.

Evidently the library remembered George Santayana's famous dicta that "Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it" and that it deserves credit and kudos.

David Isenberg

Being honest

To be honest, I was rather surprised. Of course my lack of contact with the Business School is partly to blame for my surprise concerning their plans to build an addition to their facility. I don't doubt that the Business School needs to grow — Pres. Ronald Reagan has, for quite some time, been insisting that the economy is on the "upswing." I guess it is a logical progression of sorts.

However, I disagree with the

process that the planning of this facility followed. Because the project is being funded through the gracious gift of a private donor, those involved in the planning believe that the design process should be carried out behind closed doors without outside review. What they seem to be forgetting is that regardless of the source of a building's funding, its intention is that it become a part of a public institution — the University. A university has an important position in society.

It is more than a mere collection of classrooms. It has a symbolic role that in the built environment carries the status of "monument." As such, every type of intervention within the campus fabric must be carefully considered. It is not enough for the architect to, without any further evidence, say that he has done "hundreds of placement and sketch studies." Especially when the final design appears to be merely a pragmatic solution. Neither it nor the design process are successfully preserving or enhancing the integrity of the campus.

Michael Fischer

oregon daily emerald

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