

EDITORIAL

Chung violates code of ethics

When Connie Chung recently interviewed Kathleen Gingrich, the mother of Newt Gingrich, the new Speaker of the House, she made a cardinal journalistic error. She betrayed her source in favor of a non-story.

Chung asked Kathleen Gingrich what opinions her son had of the president. While Newt Gingrich had told his mother nothing but good things about the president, she told Chung that she couldn't tell her what he said about Hillary Clinton.

Chung persisted, asking her to whisper the word to Chung, "just between you and me." Kathleen Gingrich said that her son had called the First Lady "a bitch."

Chung, in search of a big story that she could splash all over the media, lied to Kathleen Gingrich. There's just no other word to call it. She deceived her source and ran with the story, never looking back.

While Chung obviously thought that she had made a journalistic coup of sorts by finding dirt on the new Speaker, she broke the trust between herself and her source — something that just wasn't called for.

On occasion, reporters do offer anonymity to sources or listen to information with the stipulation that it is "off the record," meaning that it cannot be used in the story. Sources sometimes say things "off the record" to help journalists understand something better or to give information that they wouldn't want published in print with their name — for a variety of reasons.

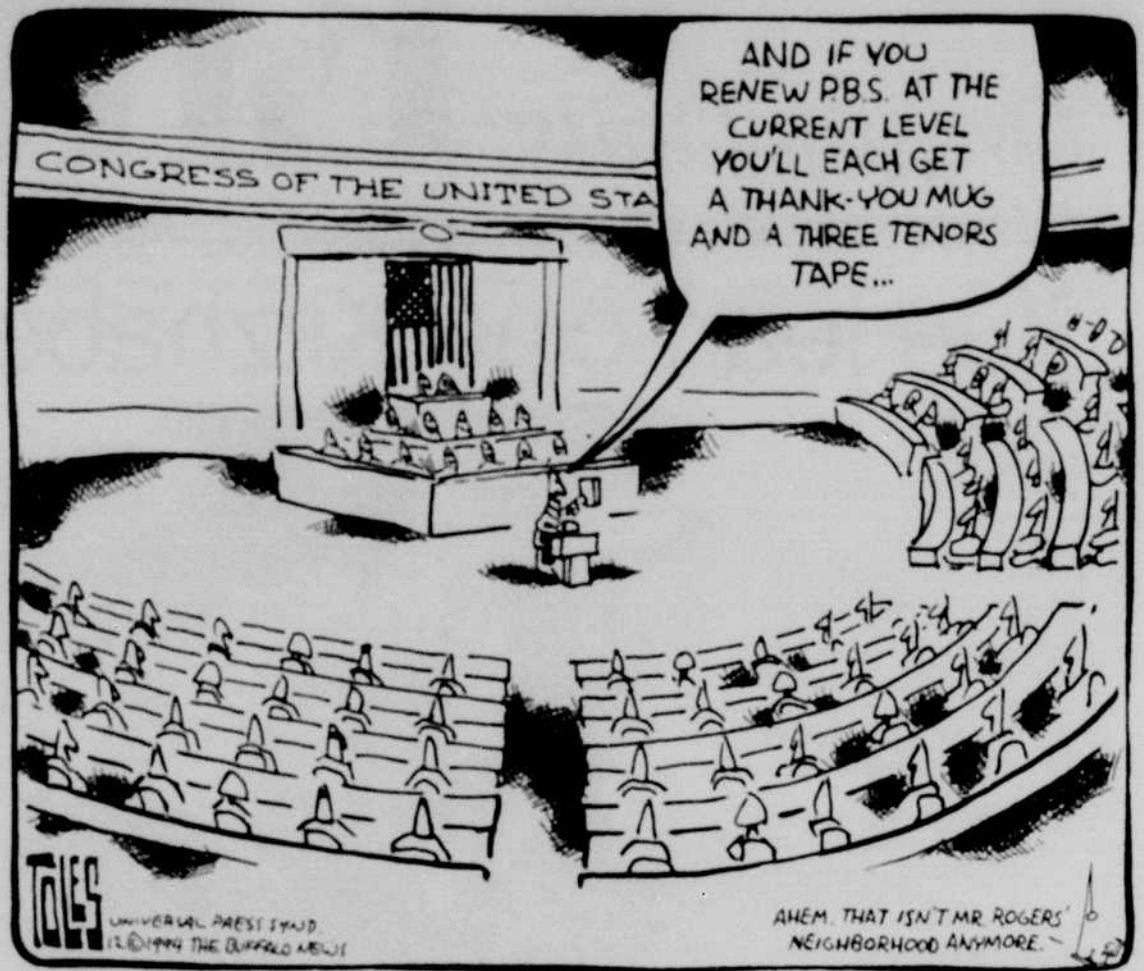
While Chung and Gingrich never technically used the words "off the record" in relation to their interview, the implication of secrecy offered by Chung is obvious. The statement shouldn't have been made public by Chung, no matter how important she felt the statement was.

The mother of the Speaker is not the proper person to ask in order to dig up dirt on her son. His mother would definitely have an interest in defending her son, but Chung took advantage of her in getting the quote. Kathleen Gingrich is not a politician nor is she skilled in interviews with the media — unlike her son. She made a mistake in implying that Newt Gingrich had said "secret" things about the First Lady, but that didn't mean that a professional reporter should step right in to take advantage of the situation.

The breach of trust by Chung makes interviewing even more difficult for journalists. Sources may not speak as openly now, wondering whether their "secret" information will wind up on the front page the following day. It also tarnishes the media in the eyes of the public, who, unfortunately, begin to expect such antics from journalists.

The issue of the alleged statement by Newt Gingrich about the First Lady isn't relevant. It's not the issue. The real issue is that of Chung and her broken promises.

It's sad that Chung, a TV news anchor and longtime journalist, would pick such a trivial thing like name-calling to stain her reputation as a responsible and ethical journalist. But it's even worse that the rest of America has to put up with it.



OPINION

Conspiracies, CIA inspire letters



ROBBIE REEVES

Once in a while, on a dark, stormy afternoon, I like to look through our files of letters that we've received here at the *Emerald* over the past year or two. My favorite file is that of letters that we don't run.

This, my friends, is a journey to the depths of the "no-go" file.

There are only a few reasons why the *Emerald* won't run a letter. Letters that are too long (more than 250 words) or have nothing at all to do with the University (neither the letter writer nor the subject of the letter are University-related) generally don't run. Neither do libelous letters.

There are other reasons why we won't run a letter. Some letters come in without a name or phone number, and we can't run those. Sorry, but we just can't. If you have an opinion, have the guts to put your name behind it.

But these are the obvious reasons, and this is where the fun begins.

I can't use the names of the authors of these vignettes, but if your opinions look like some of the following, write us some more letters. We love 'em.

My favorite letters are the ones that have to do with conspiracies. I'm not talking about the garden-variety conspiracies, the type that you'll hear about from inebriated people downtown or from a friendly well-wisher on an LTD bus, like the one about the radio transmitter in the hills that is beaming into the person's head. I'm not talking about those. Compared to some I've seen, that is relatively

normal.

My all time favorite letter is from a man that claimed to be "the deaf messenger of the Lord," who claimed that the "system," as he referred to it, was made up of bisexuals. "Life," he said, "is merely a game to these people."

The writer, who said that he wrote a letter in 1989 that "gave us 'upheaval in Europe' and 'headless bodies in Peru'" also said that he has been told that he owns the system.

Scary stuff. I'd have loved to have met this person, but he left no address or phone number on the letter. Bummer. Next letter.

Ah, another goodie. This gentleman left us his name and a phone number. Good so far. Here's the good part. "...In June of 1992, I was abruptly introduced to the Central Intelligence Agency. Initially, I honestly believed they were going to kill me."

Who knows? Were they bisexuals too?

Unfortunately, the writer goes on to describe relationships gone wrong, and the rest of the letter digresses into a sort of suicide threat. Had I received the letter (we got it a year ago), I would have called him. I have no idea what's happening with him these days. Maybe the CIA got to him. But in any case, thanks for writing!

I want to emphasize that the *Emerald* does value letters to the editor on just about every subject. If it's short enough and relevant enough, we'll publish your letter, whether we agree with what you say or not. We just won't publish your letter if it's too long, libelous, or if it seems loony. Trust me. We don't bite. Often.

Just bring it up to Suite 300, EMU, and bring some ID with you. If, like at least one other letter writer, you claim to be a close friend/relative to Jesus Christ, please show that on your ID or be able to turn water into

wine. We work long nights and could use the help.

And if, by some chance, you could get us an on-the-record interview with God, your CIA contact or the beings that beam messages into your head, please let us know. We could always use an exclusive around here.

There are other letters that are marginally interesting, but not quite off-the-wall. Last year the *Emerald* received a bunch of letters from people that whined about everything under the sun. While I don't want to be too specific about these (we ran these letters), they complain about things as petty as rude people and bad television commercials.

If I got a letter from everyone who ever encountered a rude person or saw a cheezy television commercial in their life, I'd have to come in at 2 a.m. every day to start typing your letters!

It's things like that that get me to wonder why someone takes the time to write a letter to the editor. Is it to argue a point or to get one's name in the paper? I don't know. I've always been impressed with the fact that someone cares enough to write, but when someone claims to rule the world, I've really got to wonder.

For the record, I don't support discrimination against bisexuals, or against anyone, based on sexual orientation or anything else. If most anyone else wrote a letter ripping on bisexuals, I would think that the person was another conservative out to endorse the latest anti-gay measure on the Oregon ballot.

But some of these letters are just total nonsense, and I normally wouldn't give them the time of day.

Unless, of course, it's a rainy afternoon with nothing else to do.

Robbie Reeves is editorial editor for the *Emerald*.

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