



BORN AGAIN BIRD BARELY AVOIDS 2ND TRIP TO CRYPT

THE ONLY CORPSE SUCCESSFULLY REVIVED IN RECORDED HISTORY WAS THAT OF LAZARUS, WHO WAS SAID TO HAVE LIVED FOR SEVERAL YEARS AFTERWARD. JESUS CHRIST IS REPORTED TO HAVE ARISEN FROM THE DEAD, BUT EVEN THE MOST ARDENT SUPPORTERS OF HIS RESURRECTION ADMIT HE WAS ON EARTH ONLY FORTY DAYS; AND JONAH WAS STILL ALIVE WHEN THE WHALE SPIT HIM ASHORE. COUNTLESS OTHER CLAIMS OF RESURRECTION OR REBIRTH HAVE BEEN MADE, NOT LEAST AMONG THEM COUNT DRACULA AND RICHARD NIXON. WITH SUCH INSPIRED PRECEDENT, THE NORTH COAST TIMES EAGLE IS BORN AGAIN.

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The North Coast Times Eagle was born in May 1971 as a weekly newspaper in Wheeler, which was once a booming milltown on the Nehalem River. The first editor and publisher was an orphan of French descent, Robert Stanley Need, who had been so annoyed by the corruption of his Air Force superiors in Viet Nam that he quit the service after almost twenty years. His purpose was to establish a maverick alternative to what he considered the managed news and profit oriented self-interest of the mainstream American press. For five lean and stormy years he published a feisty, rashly eccentric newspaper patterned in style and design after the small independent newspapers of the nineteenth century. During those years he employed, generally without pay, about two hundred kindred spirits who stayed as long as they could endure hunger and the Napoleonic nature of Mr. Need.

Eventually the Times Eagle collapsed, always in debt and under fire from the coastal established order. Mr. Need exhausted himself and his resources ingeniously, sometimes brilliantly, fighting to keep his newspaper alive for as long as possible, and at the end he was betrayed and forced out as publisher by a friend he had asked to save the Times Eagle. The new publisher gutted what was left of the dying bird, stole what he could, which included a few thousand dollars of donations and loans, and fled to Idaho.

The Times Eagle was born again on 20 July, 1979, the tenth anniversary of the first walk on the moon by an earthling. The banner headline of its rebirth quoted one of the astronauts when the lunar vehicle "Eagle" touched down on the moon: "The Eagle Has Landed!"

The born again bird was originally published in Cannon Beach and printed, as it continues to be, at the Daily Astorian. Two years ago the paper's operations were moved to Astoria. Its press run is small but its circulation area is along most of the Oregon coast and Portland, sometimes Eugene, and during this year's legislative session at the state capitol in Salem. A secondary circulation is provided by tourists from all over the country. Like the old Eagle, the reborn Eagle is a pauper with a large printing debt.

I was the next to last editor of the original Times Eagle in 1974. I slept on the floor of the newspaper office or on the publisher's lumpy couch, and subsisted on canned chili, spaghetti and cheap red wine. When Mr. Need's faithless friend engineered his removal and took over as publisher, I resigned.

I felt that the Times Eagle died too early, like a murdered child, and three years after it was buried I reopened its crypt. I was on Guam the last time I left Oregon forever when the old Eagle's ghost caught up with me and snapped me back like an overstretched umbilical. I chopped wood, cleaned motel rooms, hauled garbage and borrowed money from skeptical friends to get the first issue off the press, and have kept it barely afloat since on dirty dishwater as a restaurant pearl diver, as a frycook burning burgers for the masses, pouring beer and wine in a couple of taverns, swabbing floors and cleaning toilets. A journalist's life.

There is little surface resemblance between the two Eagles. I think they possess the same spirit and certainly share the same impecunious struggle to survive. Not all of its problems are from my disregard of it as a business. Small newspapers are rapidly declining although paradoxically special interest publications are on the whole prospering. The rise of the megamedia, increasing production and postal costs, dwindling subscriptions and counter sales are killing small presses. Perhaps, as television evangelists are realizing, there is a finite source of souls to crusade for or with pockets to pick.

The Times Eagle is a direct descendant of the radical newspapers that bloomed briefly in the 1950s and '60s, but its lineage goes much farther back to the rough and prickly press of our ancestors whose illtempered independence fathered the first amendment which denies government the right to prevent freedom of speech, press and assembly. It is a legacy of responsibility that is immediate and necessary but too often lost in pursuit of profit or protection

of status quo. Most of these small journals are understaffed, underfunded and seldom understood. They do not generally reflect popular opinion and operate on the cultural edge where megamedia fears to go. They act, often myopically and insensitively, as consciences and torchbearers, and most of them are fierce and shrill advocates of large or esoteric causes.

The advocacy press has no pretensions toward objectivity and few illusions about its probability. Grinding political and ideological axes is its purpose, and like presently moribund third parties in this country, small critical publications and subscription radiostations such as KMUN-FM in Astoria are kitchens for ideas. Obsession with the belief that truth is liberating and that all human beings ought by the fact of birth to be free keeps the majority of the poverty press struggling on.

The Times Eagle has flown on unsteady wings since it was raised out of the crypt, yet it has a growing readership and most of its advertisers have stayed with it despite no evidence of making a nickle out of it. It has sought to display or publish the works of artists, poets and writers who live on the coast and inland, and its readers submit a large portion of its articles. It is a newspaper that some people think is necessary, though they do not always regard it with rapture. The issues it covers are those its readers believe they should be concerned about but wish they did not have to be. It is a political polemic laden with doom and gloom, which is a nickname I have been given. A friend said that he thought the purpose of the born again bird was important but he wondered if it served any purpose when its readers wished to commit suicide in despair after reading it.

A benefit was held for the Times Eagle on June 14 at the Moose Lodge in Astoria. Five bands played and nearly one hundred coastal folk and a few from inland danced and ate chili and cornbread. They also saved the born again bird from returning to its crypt. This article has been an attempt to show them what they paid for.

— MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER



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