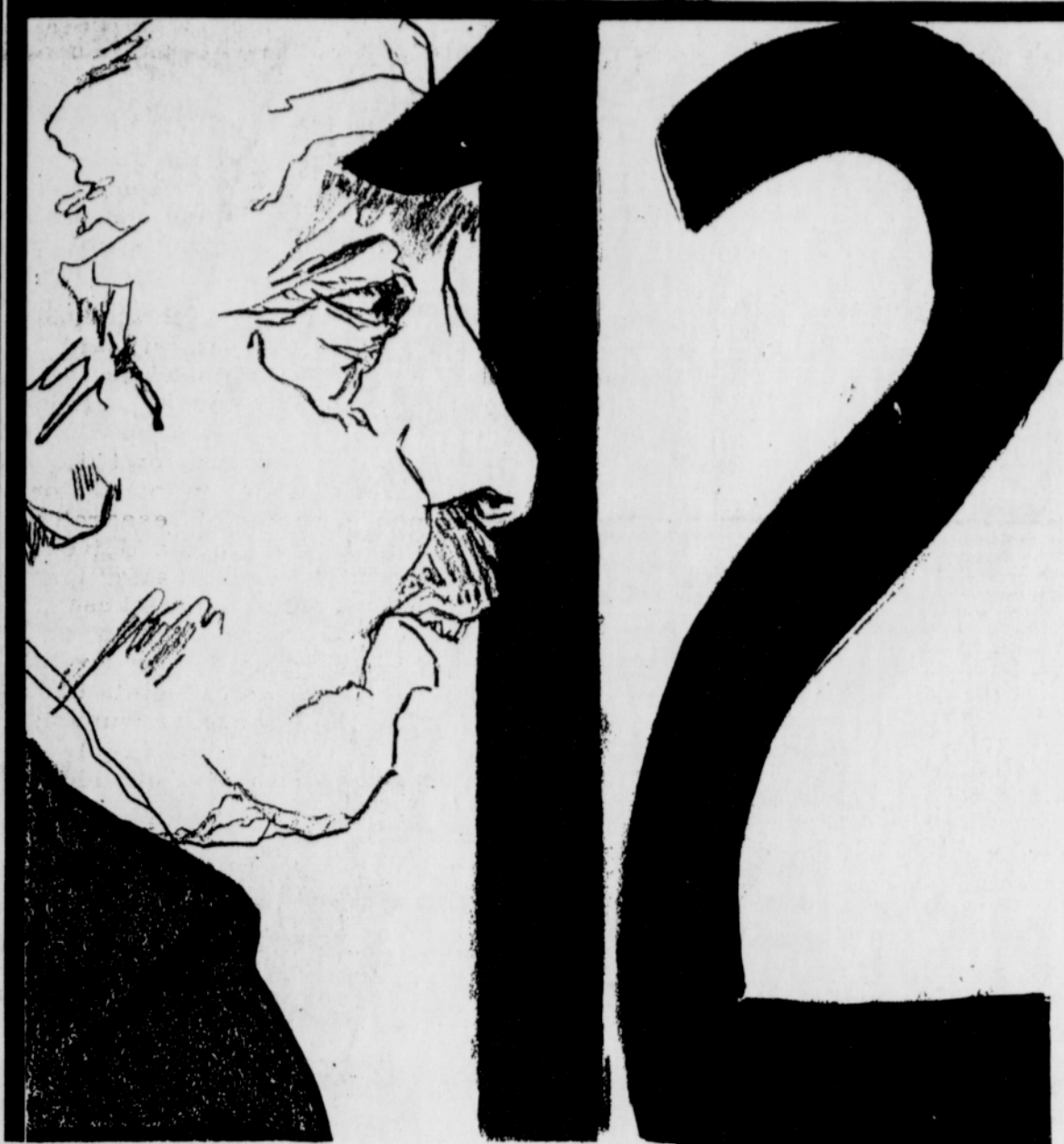




DRAWING BY GAYLE STARR

Twenty years ago, in May 1971, a man from Virginia published the first edition of the most radical newspaper ever to appear on the Oregon coast. His name was Robert Stanley Need, and his wildly uncompromising newspaper was The North Coast Times Eagle, which was born the first time on May 17, 1971.

Unfortunately, as a result of its unconditionally controversial stance, the original Eagle lasted only five years, for most of that time starving slowly (though noisily) to death for lack of financial sustenance. Robert Need acted as a Horatius holding off creditors and philosophical enemies who worked to silence his brand of rabble-rousing populist journalism. He was a hard, demanding editor and wrote inflammably about whatever he considered unjust or unfair. But he finally bowed out, exhausted and spiritually trampled, and less than a year after he surrendered his newspaper to a charlatan who had posed as a benefactor to wrest control away from its founder, the Times Eagle went to its grave.

I was the next to last editor of the original Times Eagle, and I quit at the same time the indefatigable Robert Need was no longer able or willing to hold onto his creation. The new publisher was, in a word, a louse. He ruined what was left of the newspaper from sheer avarice, and stole thousands of dollars from benefactors he coerced into donating one final time to the newspaper's survival; he exploited Robert Need's reputation for honesty, and perhaps that alone might have been intention at the start.

I waited three years to revive the dead Eagle from its sepulcher. I was traveling around the Pacific, unsure of what I wished to do yet consciously attempting to avoid being an imitation Somerset Maugham character. I almost took a

job on Guam as a copy editor for the Pacific Daily News, a Gannett acquisition with a large local readership of neo-colonial loyalists, most of whom were transplanted Filipinos who acted stuffily toward the local Moros. At the moment I was about to accept the job I experienced an epiphany that brought me back to the Oregon coast and resuscitation of the Times Eagle. I have worked on many newspapers and at least one wire service — the old Times Eagle was the one that captured my heart, brain and soul. From the moment I accepted Robert Need's exhortation that I help save his newspaper, I was impressed by its simple, hard-headed honesty. Its readership, though small, was impassioned and varied, from the eccentric to the ordinary. I never received a wage, each issue was always in threat of not being printed because of no money, and Robert Need and I were often arguing or not speaking to each other. At the end, however, we acted in concert, and refused to abet a crook who tricked him out of his newspaper. From the moment of its last issue in 1976, its new publisher hiding out in another state with the money he stole that might have given the paper a few months more of life, I felt that the Times Eagle had perished like a perocious child killed too early.

When the epiphany grasped me in mid-Pacific, I came back to Oregon, and on July 20, 1979, I published the first issue of the Born Again Bird.

This issue is the twelfth anniversary of my attempt at resurrection. It has been a different newspaper than its earlier incarnation, and its founder might be upset with my evolution of his creation. Perhaps all that it might have in common with its earlier existence is its attempt to be honest and present other points of view than the mesmerizing parochial standard. The problem with stressing heresies, however, is that unpopular or unsanctioned opinions do not usually reward or provide much sustenance to their adherents. Little newspapers like the Times Eagle operate not only on the fringe but also on the edge — of bankruptcy. Each issue is an acrobatic act of raising enough money to pay the printer.

As editor and publisher these past twelve years I count as my major failing an inattention to raising money. Instead of hustling ads and doing business I concentrate on the content and design and work at various interesting low-wage jobs to defray the paper's costs. This strategy has put the newspaper \$3000 in debt, much of which is interest grown over the years. The Daily Astorian, which prints the NCTE, has

generously agreed to cut my debt in half if I raise the money by the end of July.

You who read this newspaper are probably aware that this is the first issue in four months. It seems that almost every five years or so the paper collides with an unyielding rock. The first time killed it in 1976, though Robert Need had saved the original Eagle from numerous near-deaths. The Born Again Bird fell out of the sky for nine months after celebrating its fifth anniversary out of the crypt. And now, five and a half years later, the paper hit ground again earlier this year. Once more it has been given a reprieve.

Many friends have suggested ways to make money. Sell advertising, of course, and finally start subscriptions. And each year for the past four, readers of the paper have organized parties of music and dance to raise money. Other ideas include sustainer subscriptions in which supporters shell out an amount far in excess of a normal subscription to keep the paper printing; subscribers send in annual dues but instead of having a paper delivered or mailed to them, they are issued a card which entitles them to take a copy wherever the paper is sold without paying (all outlets would be made aware of the deal, of course); and that I stop giving copies of the paper away free of charge, though I argue that the newspaper is really all I have to give to anyone. Raising the price to a dollar from fifty cents has also been suggested, with the logic that if only half continue to buy it at that price I still make the same amount as now.

I am certain that a newspaper of this nature cannot be self-sustaining in a small area, which means I must attempt expanding its circulation to reach newer readers in more communities on the coast and inland.

Recently I almost let the paper die a final death. I planned to go off and do something else, not so much to make money but to wash out the bitter taste of failure. I was unable to stay away long. The same feeling that brought me back from halfway across the Pacific drives me still, against logic; I do not seem able to abandon the Times Eagle. I believe it has a purpose larger than I understand and I feel a stewardship to its possibilities, though I am not clever enough to exploit them. The people who contribute the articles, the artwork, poems, photographs and points of view are responsible for what is good about the newspaper — and I do listen to what people tell me about how I should operate the paper, though it might not seem so. As a matter of fact, I am asking now for any of you to offer suggestions and ideas to keep the newspaper alive.

Robert Need and I publish very different newspapers, though the lineage is recognizable. Our purpose has been the same — to exercise the First Amendment like a muscle, to push at it and goad it, to not allow it to slip into Alzheimer's through neglect or apathy, and to slap away the hands that wish to strangle it.

— MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER



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