

MOONSTRUCK EAGLE IS 15



DRAWING BY ROGER HAYES

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"Journalists are a lot less popular than undertakers."
—MOLLY IVINS

"The world is not safe/ from the moonbitten fool."
—MICHAEL MARSH

25 years have passed since astronaut Neil Armstrong took "a large step for mankind" on the moon, July 20, 1969. The human inhabitants of Earth had reunited their planet with its satellite.

Ten years later on the very same day a less noticeable event occurred on the Oregon coast. A paper Eagle emerged from a three-year crypt, born again from premature death. "THE EAGLE HAS LANDED" shouted its first Page 1 bannerline, echoing a message flashed to the world from space when the moonlander Eagle struck Luna's surface. Beneath the banner a pissed-off American Bald Eagle glared fiercely out at the world.

The miraculous — some thought morbid; others insane — rebirth of the North Coast Times Eagle was explained in its first manifesto: The Born Again Bird was revived "because First Amendment newspapers have become as rare as the nation's symbol, the Bald Eagle. The independent press has virtually disappeared into the huge corporations that control the country and probably the world...In this age of the great systems devotion to any principle other than the status quo seems quaint and naive, and faintly dangerous (but) the enormous pressures of population and economics threaten the way we live. The great contradictions between freedom and property have finally reached us...Like everything else the role of the press is in

question. There should be no doubt. The press should have no special interest than the First Amendment. This becomes patently impossible when the press is controlled by corporations whose interests are often in conflict with the Constitution. The great renegade journalist A.J. Leibling once said the press was free only to those who owned one."

Fifteen years later (the Cold War over, the "Evil Empire" of Russian communism swept into the dustbin of history) the nation and its citizens are plugging rapturously into an electronic superhighway of infotainment that proposes infinite possibilities and no few dark prophecies. Government and the newly consolidated mediocrities desire control of the worldwide computer internet that until recently was used by rural traffic (scientists, nerds and lovelorn). Power in the new world corporate capitalist order is shifting to control and manipulation of the immense flow of information, up until recently a vital resource but now the treasure of Midas.

The information highway is plastic, fluid, still unpredictable despite corporate and government invasion of its wide open cyberspaces. But the pervasive ambitions of monopoly are felt and reverberate through electronics networks. The concentration of ownership of the media is ominous and significant cause for paranoia. Huge conglomerates own and manipulate information that is increasingly vital for personal survival (info breeds info) while simultaneously producing mediocrity.

Out on the fringe publications like the Times Eagle struggle mightily to survive in this age of media titans. The resurrected Eagle has been out of its crypt for 15 years, usually malnourished, hogtied by its own paradox (which caused its original demise). Radically inclined, its own vows of poverty dovetail with probability and implicitly limit financial contact with ideologically incorrect sources of wealth and funding that spread the diseased creed of consumer/consumption through mainstream commercial media. Naked appeals for money to readers are embarrassing but necessary. Public radio and TV stations, as well as smaller independent listener-sponsored stations KMUN in Astoria and Portland's KBOO (25 years old this year), raise capital by on-air pledge drives a few times each year (plus grants, underwriting and other subsidies). Small potatoes newspapers take their begging bowls out on the street like hungry monks or organize parties with music, poetry, food and liquids,

and pass the hat among fans, sympathizers and rubbernecks who come through the door.

Our quickly consumerable society takes its momentum more from waste than production much like emphysema inspires the lungs by excess CO₂ rather than oxygen. Whatever might be said of the Times Eagle (which many call the Eagle Times) in its favor or disgrace, it is not quickly consumed unless hurled into a fire. Bucking a trend toward nanoprint journalism, Times Eagle articles are long and wordy, often almost essay length, and require time and concentration, which is sure-death in an immediate gratification/disposal market. Newspapers by their nature are perishable, read once and disposed of, but reading demands active mental involvement unlike passive potato television. Journalism comes in as many forms as music, high and lowbrow, elegant and classy, pop-schmaltzy, hot and jazzy. Its purpose is an almanac of events but also to pierce veils.

"Without an independent press, journalism is hardly more than a useful method of misleading the public, or providing illusions and deceptions to thwart public response to the chicaneries and jingoism of the equestrian class who regard themselves as the nation's lords and ladies."

That's a quote from the Eagle's 10th birthday in 1989. Also from that ceremonial issue (which additionally commemorated Bastille 200): The Times Eagle "is a newspaper that some people think is necessary, though they do not regard it with rapture. It is a polemic laden with doom and gloom, which prompted one reader to ask if it served any purpose if its readers were in such despair after reading an issue they considered suicide."

The scatological father of the original Eagle was Robert Stanley Need, a flamboyant, richly articulate, socially pretentious, editorially fearless and straightforward once legendary figure now barely remembered on the Oregon coast his newspaper heated white hot for five remarkable years in the early '70s. I have been responsible for its second lifetime for 15 years, which is quite a long time to nurture an obsession. Not a nickel's worth of profit has been recorded in a ledger I decline to keep. If I can be forgiven another quote from an earlier explanation for publishing the newspaper, this from its 5th birthday, "Much to the despair of those few who had been close to the Old Bird its first lifetime, its rebirth did not resolve its previous problems of health...The Old Eagle was noted for its raffish honesty and its courage of an Androcles. Where it went sour was about money."

I revived the Old Bird after it had lain in a crypt three years. I thought it had died prematurely, like a murdered child. I tried to justify this unnatural attachment to a runty, half-starved, pulled from the grave newspaper when it was 10 years old.

"The NCTE is a member of the Poverty Press. It is one of a few small presses obsessed with a vision unaffected by commerce. It is descended from radical newspapers that blossomed briefly (and) its lineage threads back to the prickly press that fostered the First Amendment, which denies government or anyone else the right to interfere with freedom of speech. The independent advocacy press has few pretensions toward objectivity and fewer illusions about its probability. Most small independent journals are chronically understaffed, underfunded and generally misunderstood because they seldom reflect popular opinion. They act, often myopically and insensitively, as consciences and torchbearers, and most are fierce and shrill advocates of large or esoteric causes. They are usually on hard times and fail more often than they are replaced."

On the other hand, a more upbeat note from the same 10th birthday mea culpa: "The very small can grow and relatively prosper inbetween the cracks and shadows of the Megabig, like ferns on a forest floor. Mouses must roar, after all, and bite at the ankles of ponderous tyrannies if we are to keep our heads and humor. Micromedia, flamboyant, irreverent, raffish and patched, is on the march into the 21st century."

I will end this 15th birthday card with the flamboyant opening lines of the resurrection manifesto of Vol 1, No 1, July 20, 1979.

"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 back on Earth only 40 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."

And still going 15 years later.

Roger Hayes drew the Eagle on this page as a 15th birthday present for the Times Eagle.



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