

with the *Times Eagle*. He was responsible for its best and worst just as the paper with its continual staff rebellions and walkouts was its own definition of dissent and revolution. His idealistically unhinged form of journalism made the *North Coast Times Eagle* a mouse whose bite made elephants roar. His editorship, if not covered with glory, was smeared with the blood of enemies and friends: absolutely nothing or anyone interfered with his Gallic obsession to challenge the institutions and individuals that he believed were obstructing or manipulating the will and freedoms of the people. He had guts, a desk pounding outrage against the powerful or wealthy who squeezed the little people. He was an environmentalist who fought against the Oregon coast becoming a Coney island of tourism. And there were times when Robert Stanley Need and his little *Times Eagle* acted out the morality drama of Horatius at the bridge or the little Dutch boy who stuck his finger in a leaky dike.

His own fingers were bruised many times for the stands he took, which were generally unpopular with those who might have provided advertising. His politics were an ambiguous range from benevolent tyranny to sentimental radicalism. His editorials goaded friend and enemy. Sometimes his writing succeeded brilliantly, at others it broke its spine from the weight of his metaphors and misanthropy. Beneath his pomposity and cunning was a primordial basalt of integrity and kindness as genuine as it was absentminded. He had spent a career in the Air Force but his service in Vietnam affronted his morality to the point of a mental breakdown. The war was incandescent in his spirit. It had almost destroyed his sanity, left him shaken and chaotic, but it made him acuminately sensitive to pain and injustice. He fought long before others realized a struggle was in process and often long after it was over. An angry letter once denounced the NCTE as a local *Pravda* and its staff as communists. Need responded with an editorial that suggested the *Times Eagle* staff would most likely be among the first shot if communists or anyone else took control of the country while good citizens such as the letter writer would probably continue to be law abiding denizens under the new regime.

"Neither the *Times Eagle* nor its writers have any obligation whatsoever to please the state, or for that matter, please all of its readership, all of the time," Need wrote in an editorial in 1975. "Intelligent readers have found this dramatically true over the past four years and have assisted us in an expansion of influence that has led the *Times Eagle* to an unassailable position as a widely read forum of public opinion. The freedom to express one's self, either staff or readership, has developed a favorable recognition of this publication as 'one of the finest expressions of independence' within the state of Oregon and even beyond."

He literally carried the paper for almost five years. The stories of his attempts to keep the *Times Eagle* alive were legendary to the point of disbelief. He juggled schemes that were as often astonishingly complex as they were preposterous. He was in constant search for Angels, either financial or editorial who could keep the NCTE afloat, and he touted them as virtually superhuman when he found them which caused misunderstanding among other Angels. One wealthy Angel who had agreed to bankroll the newspaper received a heavenly call only hours before he was to sign the check. Other prospective Angels had little money or talent and tarnished quickly. Somehow during even the leanest years the *Times Eagle* was printed every week, often a bare skeleton and just as often a day or two late.

"For five years the (*Times Eagle*) shined a light on the activities of Tillamook and Clatsop County government, the state legislature, tackled development and environmental issues and made enemies of the corrupt and powerful with every new issue that appeared," Peter Smith, editor/publisher of the *Bay City Slug* ("The Paper That Hates Progress") wrote of the dead Old Bird's 30th anniversary in 2001. "Dozens of neighbors helped get the paper out — mostly seniors and teenagers writing articles, taking photos, answering phones, drawing pictures, pasting up copy and then delivering newspapers. For many teenagers, working at the *Eagle* was their first job, though few who 'worked' there ever recall receiving money for doing it. The paper was a community affair. Subscriptions and advertisements never paid the bills... Sadly the wages for reporting on corrupt business practices and stupidity in government have always been low."

"The *Times Eagle* was a quixotic circus of romantic idealism and fiscal mismanagement that time after time snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, but its editorial credo of printing the 'Truth' remained inviolate to the end," former staffer MacCormack wrote in his epitaph, *Death of the Screaming Eagle*. "It had emerged as a fierce crusading coastal advocate of strong environmentalist persuasions and a watchdog of local city and county governments, with an equally adamant overview of state, national and international affairs."

The *Times Eagle* finally consumed Need. He ran out of inspirations and Angels. He lost control of the paper and he did not know why he should regain it. Toward the end he was regarded as unstable and with contempt by a new staff of writers who were captivated by what they thought was the charisma of the friend who betrayed him. Robert Stanley Need, flamboyant, richly articulate, socially pretentious and editorially fearless had once been a legendary figure but is now barely remembered on the Oregon coast his newspaper heated white hot for five remarkable years.



GAYLE McKENNON (1979)

I was the next to last editor of the old *Times Eagle*. My six month tenure, which was about average (MacCormack also grabbed his hat off the rack after six months), began in the summer of 1974. The paper had survived three tumultuous years of heartrending poverty, constant staff insurrections and a number of 11th hour recoveries. The phone was disconnected and there were no vehicles to get around for stories or to the printers 100 miles away in Toledo. The staff was unpaid and hungry, and a few days after my arrival deserted enmasse. I

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

The only corpse successfully revived in recorded history was that of Lazarus, who is said to have lived 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 40 days, and Jonah was still alive when the whale spit him ashore. Countless other claims of resurrection or rebirth have been made, not the least among them Count Dracula and Richard Nixon. With such inspired precedent, the *North Coast Times Eagle* is born again.

It is born again because First Amendment newspapers have become as rare as the nation's symbol, the Bald Eagle. The independent press has virtually disappeared, homogenized into the huge corporations that also control the country, and probably the world.

In this age of the great systems devotion to any principle other than perpetuation of the status quo seems quaint and naïve, and faintly dangerous. Yet even the most random demographic of this wild and stormy coast would show that loyalty to the metallic demands of the corporate structure is not a prime aspiration of its inhabitants. To the contrary, this rare splinter of sand between mountains and ocean has traditionally served as a refuge for those seeking the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Men and women of all ages and preoccupations who have immigrated here or who have remained here demand personal control over their own lives.

But even that has come into conflict. 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 represent no other special interest than the First Amendment. This becomes patently impossible when the press is controlled by the corporations whose interests are often in conflict with the Constitution. The renegade newsman A. J. Liebling once said that of course the press was free, to whoever who owned one.

Exactly 10 years ago a space capsule named the *Eagle* landed on the Moon, and for the first time in history a human being stepped onto a planet other than Earth. It was the most spectacular accomplishment in history. Our expectations since then have more or less followed the course of Skylab, which fell out of the sky.

We live in an increasingly nasty time. The petroleum age races to its end. Inflation and recession tumble over each other. The country crawls with greed and corruption. Perhaps the war to end wars will occur soon. Even the world's weather is grim.

Twice out of the egg and once out of the crypt, the reborn *Times Eagle* will attempt lighting matches against a darkening wind.

—MICHAEL McCUSKER
20 JULY, 1979

spent the summer and fall hitchhiking to events and interviews up and down the coast (meeting in transit many gregarious residents and visitors). I slept on the newsroom floor or on a lumpy musty couch and ate spaghetti and canned chili washed down by cheap red wine. My relations with Need were usually at critical mass. My opinion of him was contradictory, a mosaic of anger, frustration, affection and respect. It was difficult to not be drawn to his blustery and lofty idealism, although it was also wearisome and not always endearing. I began to retaliate by putting the name 'Robert Stanley Bananas' on his byline, which he always discovered before the paper went to press. (It was also tradition to conceal a 19th century *Punch* drawing of a well-dressed rodent among the few advertisements: "No rats in the food ads!" Need would shout after careful scrutiny.)

I last saw him a couple of weeks after he had been deposed. He was leaving Oregon that day and going back home to Norfolk, Virginia. He said his nerves were shot and he looked frazzled and downcast as a chewed chicken wing. A woman I knew gave him a ride to the Washington side of the Columbia River. He gave her a dollar for my back wages, hitchhiked to Seattle and rode a train back east. A friend from Nehalem visited several years ago and reported to me that Need had made a success of publishing another newspaper. I suspect any success would bear little resemblance to "the distinctive and unique journal of the Oregon coast," a lofty slogan he emblazoned on the face of every *Times Eagle*.

The paper did not last long after his departure. The new publisher picked it clean and abandoned it after ruining its reputation. "At the end, in March 1976, the *North Coast Times Eagle* was a ghost, hunted by its creditors in the streets of what once were its own cities," John MacCormack wrote in *Death of the Screaming Eagle*. "The corporeal body, a few crates of hastily stacked files and decrepit equipment lay in ignominious cold storage in Manzanita, its final place of rest. Why the paper failed is a question that screams with possibilities. It started with a suicidally inadequate financial base and quickly alienated what little advertising that existed along a poverty stricken stretch of Highway 101. But the deeper question is whether a newspaper that maintains an unbridled editorial voice and exploits fully its First Amendment rights to freedom of the press, as the *Times Eagle* undeniably did, can still survive in modern America without being as large, well ensconced and unassailable as *The New York Times*."

(MacCormack's epitaph for the NCTE began a new set of publishing tombstones. *One Dollar Magazine* in Portland folded soon after printing it in the summer of 1976, and a magazine in Eugene [*Eugene*] that carried *One Dollar's* eulogy soon died. It became a curse in Northwest publishing to pay tribute to a fallen press.)

The *Times Eagle* lay dead for three years and almost all evidence of its former existence was burned, bulldozed, lost, buried in libraries, forgotten in basements or attics, or in the case of its former staff, scattered across the country and around the world. Its death was unmourned by many, particularly those who dealt with it financially. Perhaps also a few public officials and others who were treated critically in its pages were pleased by its demise. But here and there along the coast and tucked into the mountains were pockets of a contrary view, people who missed the paper and wished something like it would start up again.

Bay City Slug editor/publisher Peter Smith wrote in his 30 year tribute in 2001: "From its inception the *North Coast Times Eagle* with its whimsical 19th century engravings and penetrating witty coverage of local politics, to its unpleasant demise five years later in 1976 from financial starvation, informed, amazed and at times infuriated readers. Three years after the original paper folded, in 1979 writer Michael Paul McCusker revived the *Eagle*, publishing it from Cannon Beach, but soon moved to Astoria where he has (here Editor Smith bloats) stood in the breach defending the First Amendment and human dignity in its pages...."

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 native Moros. At the moment I was about to accept the job I experienced an epiphany that brought me back to the Oregon coast and resurrection of the *Times Eagle*. I had worked on many newspapers and at least one wire service* — the old *Times Eagle* was the one that captured my heart, brain and fervor. From the moment I accepted Robert Need's exhortation that I help save his newspaper, I was impressed by its simple, hardheaded 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 although Need and I were often arguing or not speaking to each other, at the end we acted in concert and refused to abet the treacherous crook who tricked

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



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