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inventory on the Internet. And at that point, 1994, the Internet was a social media, not an economic media. It was against the informal rules, but you could get into a lot of trouble if you tried to sell something on the Internet when we started. But that was changing. We weren't the first to start selling books on the Internet but we were certainly one of the first. And then from 1994 to 2003 or so there was this great gold rush opportunity to sell books on the Internet, and lots of people saw that happening and it became a very competitive market and a crowded venue.

It's been a small part of our business and continues to be a small part. Then you have Amazon come in with the Kindle and had the market share and the dollars to make it work, and of course now you have the iPad. But it's only been in the last five years that there's been a serious competitor to the book.

J.Z.: *In five and 10 years on, is Powell's City of Books going to be the same place?*

M.P.: It shouldn't be. I told Emily when I signed the business over that if we're doing exactly the same thing in five years I'm going to take it back. Because you have to be constantly adapting, finding new strategies to present material and display it and what material you're displaying, and the mix between new and used, and all of that needs constant attention and there's an evolution to all that. And more importantly what's our strategy for electronics? And she's hard at work at helping us find a way to be more relevant in that electronic world.

This is very much a hold-and-see-what-happens environment. You watch Borders slowly slide over the precipice and you thank God it's not you. And you figure out what they did wrong and what you can do to avoid their fate.

J.Z.: *Are you nostalgic for the way things were?*

M.P.: I don't think we're in the buggy whip business just yet. But I sometimes wonder if we're going to be the last. I'm not nostalgic, but I enjoy, and still think most people do, the printed book. It's a question of how much you have to accommodate the new technologies and how much you continue to make what you do important to people.

J.Z.: *When we talk about the new climate, I think of WikiLeaks. What are your thoughts about that and the new world of journalism and distributing information? I know censorship is a bailiwick of yours.*

M.P.: It is. I can't say much about WikiLeaks, but it used to be that publishers, rightly or wrongly — whether they're newspaper, book magazine, TV, radio — exercised judgment, and that judgment would be based on quality, social mores. For example, you wouldn't see pornography or a variety of other things in print. Mainstream publishers didn't print what we call pornography, and there was a holding-back of some kind. Across most fronts now that holding back has evaporated, short of what's illegal, and in some cases what is illegal. Those books were clearly labeled; you could choose to view them or not. But I would say books, like Madonna's book, began to cross that threshold, and it was in your face. And I think with the Internet and that rush to get anything you can say said, it doesn't have to be verified for fact, and WikiLeaks is probably an example of that phenomenon. Whether it's good for the country or not, I don't know. I personally have a reservation about publishing something that puts people's lives at risk. I'm not putting that standard out there as a First Amendment standard. But diplomacy can't operate where everything is out in the public. I've been in meetings where we're trying to sort out approaches to problems, and if every word were in the

Oregonian, nothing would happen, because when you're looking over your shoulder trying to second-guess every word you said and how it's being viewed. It stifles process.

J.Z.: *How would you assess the current climate for business in Portland?*

M.P.: I can tell you right now, the economy is not great. There are a lot of businesses hurting and we're down a little bit. How much of that is the e-book world and how much of it is the economy, I have no way of parsing that information. When you have unemployment in excess

10 percent, that's fewer dollars churning through. Customers are more cautious; they're buying less expensive books. And so we have to be aware of those situations.

I kind of feel like things are beginning to pick up a little bit, and I don't know why I say that. This is the only recession where I think people ate their way through it. I don't go to a restaurant that doesn't seem to be packed. But I don't know if the restaurateurs would agree with that. And there are restaurants closing, but then there are 600 food carts open, too.

It will come back, at some level, at some pace, and there's every indication that it will be slow.

J.Z.: *How much is in the hands of the city, the efforts of the Portland Business Alliance, by fellow businessmen downtown? What can be done by the city to do better?*

M.P.: There are lots of elements into why a business is downtown and why it's not. There are a lot of reasons why people do business in the suburbs: Free parking and lots of it. Streets are arguably less congested, access to the suburban customer, so you have the Washington Squares of the world. I would say that downtown has been relatively healthy. The Business Alliance has done a great job of working on some of the issues that are constraining — graffiti, street cleaning, working with agencies to help on the homeless situation. I think the business community here has a good record to deal with some of the issues that make downtown more challenging. And I think we have a very healthy downtown. There are elements that I wish weren't there.

But I would say that compared to other downtowns, it's a pretty vibrant central city. In my lifetime, certainly in the last 20 years, virtually all the arterial streets; Mississippi, Alberta ...

J.Z.: *There are a lot of adorable shops opening, but they're also closing. And I wonder how you view these changes in those communities, reflecting on your own entrepreneurial experience when you see these businesses pop up and then close in a year and half.*

M.P.: Some close, but not all. But overall, I think most people would say they appreciate what happened on these streets and it's why people move to Portland. It's economic vitality. That kind of move of the new urban infrastructure and grittiness, if you want to call it that, made it exciting. I grew up here and I came back in 1979, and I could count on one hand the number of restaurants I would consider taking out-of-town guests to. That's all changed. It might be seen as superficial, but people find it fun, and that's what makes life interesting.

And books figure into that. I'm not unmindful of what Powell's has meant to this community, sometimes I can't believe it. It's a blessing.

J.Z.: *What are you reading these days?*

M.P.: Most recent book I picked up is on the Norman occupation on England, and I've been going through a whole phase of Medieval history. The occasional mystery or thriller. I read a couple of books a week. My reading's limited to after the dishes are washed.

Floater

By Jay Thiemeyer

for a decade roughly
 during the bulk of the seventies
 I floated then sat
 and drank
 and drank and drank
 through alleys, dead cars, buildings, highways
 through the eighties and nineties till 2002
 with all that came to that death
 dealing garbage pail
 life
 not my own
 by a long shot I merely stood by
 watching
 (or sat, rather sat)
 myself from a distance remote walking a
 thousand plus
 miles a day from feed to feed and back again to wait again
 dropping it wherever, oblivious
 and content in my drained numb madness
 I didn't die but was helped
 'anonymous giving' I call
 what they did: intervention
 the agency called it and it worked after a fashion
 I still miss
 the freedom in that dream state
 twenty years in the rain I forget
 I forget all but the freedom me and my
 myriad thoughts
 racing nowhere
 really just derangement, really bad
 derangement it was and it doesn't
 get a bit better
 no matter how many times I attempt
 that solipsist's derangement, that dream,
 never amounts to freedom the dream state
 become an insult to the
 brain.
 100s don't work no more
 not even when chased with a bit
 to eat.
 Once not long ago I stuck my thumb out to follow it
 wherever it would take me.
 I carried my dream state derangement on my back
 in my knapsack, one long
 bottle's worth
 what I got for my thumb-thinking
 was a stolen knapsack
 and a ride home in a squad car.
 with only an admonition this time:
 I almost pleaded
 give me a charge, put some kinda charge on me
 don't treat me like some goddam old man, I said,
 in a low tired voice.
 the bubble had burst without me
 me and my thumb come to a sucked dry place
 time to reload, someone suggested.
 we think not
 we truly think not
 I'll leave that childish innocence to another
 dreamer lost in a bottle floating down through it

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