

ISTHMUS

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Letters to the Editor
Madison Magazine
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July 31, 1989

Dear Folks,

Thanks so much for Doug Moe's sympathetic account of my travails with Madison Newspapers Inc. (Press Box, August issue). It was well written and quite humorous, and I'm amazed that Moe was able to crank out yet another media column without resorting to research.

Just one small thing. The one specific Moe cites to illustrate my prowess as a reporter--the bit about Lee Enterprises buying 200 shares of Capital Times stock--well, no offense Doug, but that happens to be something I never reported. The MNI papers themselves reported this in their own pages in response to my report that Lee had made offers for said stock. In fact, I don't see what's so significant about this information--200 of 120,000 shares, who cares?--and I speculated in my censored letter to the Cap Times (which Moe has a copy of) that the paper's decision to focus on this was in part an attempt to detract attention from some of the more damning things I reported, such as how much money MNI makes.

It's not a big deal, folks, just a little something I wanted to set straight. But I wonder: If, as Moe contends, my heavyhandedness (i.e., calling Moe a linthead) makes me not a good columnist, what does Moe's persistent failure to check basic information before writing his own columns make him?

Just a thought. Thanks again.

Best,



Bill Lueders
News Editor

PEOPLE PROFILE



PHOTO BY BOB RASHID

Susan Ross Steingass/Dane County Circuit Court Judge

Birthdate: December 18, 1941.

Marital and child status: Married to William F. Nelson. I have one son, Brook, age 18. Bill has two daughters and one son, all adults.

Education: Bachelor of Arts, Denison University; Master of Arts, Northwestern University; Juris Doctor, University of Wisconsin.

My first job was: Waitress at a resort hotel.

I came to Madison because: I retained Wisconsin residency, though I'd been living in Spain, and so could afford (barely) to go to Law School here.

The books I'm recommending these days are: Larry McMurry's *Lonesome Dove* and Ed McClanahan's *The Natural Man*.

If I could do things over, I would: Do them about the same, except I'd have had lots more kids, finished my Ph.D. in English, and kept up with scuba diving.

If I could live in another time in history, it would be: During the 19th Century development of the American frontier.

If I could change one thing about myself, it would be: To stop being five minutes late (okay, ten).

My favorite childhood memory is: My father being home from World War II.

Most people are surprised when I tell them: That I spent lots of time on the road during the '60s and '70s.

If I've learned one thing from life it is: That a sense of humor is basic to happiness.

My favorite all-time movie is: David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, though I don't like it as well now as I did then.

My favorite saying is: "It ain't over 'til it's over." Yogi Berra.

If I were given an all-expense paid vacation, I would go to: The Australian outback.

Press Box

When this column debuted some three and one-half years ago, the idea that anyone would turn the tables on the local newspapers and write about them was not warmly received by the powers that be at Madison Newspapers, Inc.

The loudest howls of outrage came from people like *Capital Times* editor Dave Zweifel, and the paper's executive publisher, Bob Meloon, who criticized me for writing about the papers without talking to people at the papers.

Actually, I spoke with many reporters—I just didn't ring up management to get their carefully worded denials of various newsroom rumors. In retrospect, they were probably right; I should have called, but following Jimmy Breslin's dictum that the first rule of journalism is to never admit a mistake, I stuck to my guns.

In any case, when MNI management did talk, the results were not particularly enlightening. Bob Meloon told a bald-faced lie to Tedd O'Connell, denying he'd said something at a *Cap Times* staff meeting that three reporters told me he had said.

In one instance I did call *State Journal* publisher Jim Burgess, when I learned the papers had been deceiving everyone about their ownership status for 40 years. When I reached Burgess, he suggested I call their lawyer.

Lately another local reporter has been writing about MNI, and now it seems that even if you call them repeatedly for comment, the newspaper executives resent being treated the way their reporters treat everyone else.

In recent months Bill Lueders of *Isthmus* has been all over MNI like stink on a goat. Originally the MNI people congratulated him for checking things out with them, unlike another magazine writer (Hi there!), but now these great defenders of a free press are refusing to talk to Lueders.

I should point out that I have no compelling reason to pat Lueders on the back. He once called me a "linthead" in print, and even if there have been mornings when I thought his description fairly apt, name-calling is the kind of heavyhanded writing that keeps Lueders from being a good columnist.

As a reporter, he's better—dogged and unafraid of authority. And he has been doing a fine job poking around where the MNI people don't want him. One example: In June, Lueders revealed that Lee Enterprises, which provides editorial services for the *State Journal*, has purchased 200 shares of stock in the *Capital Times* Company.

The labyrinthian ownership-editorial situation of the *Capital Times*, *Wisconsin State Journal*, and MNI could fill a volume the size of *War and Peace*, and much of Lueders' reporting, and my own, has been an attempt to detail the inexorable drift toward a merging of all functions at the papers, the notion of which fills editorial employees with fear and loathing. They don't like to talk about it, and neither do the three-piece suits who are making it happen.

How badly they don't want to talk about it now can be seen in the example of the persistent Lueders, who in the past several weeks has written letters to the editor of both papers on the subject which have not been printed.

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Upfront

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According to Lueders, Dave Zweifel has recently expressed a reluctance to be interviewed. Fred Miller, publisher of the *Capital Times*, originally agreed to be interviewed, but on June 20 sent the following thoughtful note to Lueders: "I've changed my mind. I do not intend to submit to any more interviews either in person or by telephone."

It now seems the MNI folks are mad at me for not calling them, and mad at Lueders, if not for calling them, then for what he wrote

after he called them.

Or maybe they're just mad that although they've monopolized the daily press in this city, they can't muzzle all dissenting voices—at least not yet.

Perhaps I should call Fred Miller for a comment. But he probably won't talk to me, for not talking to him originally. Jim Burgess doesn't seem to be talking to anybody these days. I suppose I could talk to Lueders, but he called me a bad name, so the hell with him.

Fortunately there are no egos in journalism.

—D.M.

Fashion Shows in the Madison Area



Walnut Grove—(In conjunction with Madison Newspapers, Inc.) will hold a benefit fashion show for the Empty Stocking Fund. The show, to be held Thursday, August 13, at the Edgewater Hotel, is open to the public. Tickets are \$20 each, with \$10 going to the fund. It starts at 6:30 p.m. with a cash bar, dessert will be served at 7 p.m. Stores involved are: Talbots, Motherhood, The Company Store, I.M. Petite, Size More, and Woldenberg's. The Diane Jon staff will do make-overs on stage.

Jan Byce's/MacNeil & Purnell—Fashion show for the Blue Line Club. To be held at the Concourse Hotel September 19. Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m.

Rendall's—September 8, at Edge Fest. 12:30 p.m. luncheon, and show at 1 p.m. Fall clothing, sportswear, coordinates, and suitings. Tickets available through Edge Fest.

Metropolitan Women's Club will present a fashion show at Queen of Peace Church on October 16. Contact Metropolitan Women's Club for information.

Hilldale Mall—"Working Women's Forum" to be held two Thursdays a month starting with August 17. 12:15 to 12:45 p.m. This is a "brown bag" showing. Free soda will be available. Other dates are September 14 and 28, October 12 and 26, November 9 and December 7. The shows are sponsored by the Hilldale merchants.

Redwood & Ross—West Towne. September (tentative). Call 833-8809 for date and time.

Onyx ORNAMENTS

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