



Tom Riordan

Executive
Editor

Will editors ever understand lensmen?

Newspaper photographers are an unusual breed. Often, money isn't overly important to them. What they want most are a gadget bag full of exotic lenses, lots of film and editors who appreciate their pictures.

Usually they're lucky if they have two of the three. But no matter — they always keep trying in their fascinating ways.

SPENDING AN AFTERNOON with a roomful of these lensmen and lenswomen is always great fun for me. It has happened many times for me over the past 20 years. Most recently was a couple of Saturdays ago at Southfield's Michigan Inn. The Michigan Press Photographers annual photo contest and seminar were in session.

Gary Caskey, an Observer & Eccentric photographer who labors for the Plymouth and Canton editions, was chairman of the seminar. He casually invited me to drop in and probably was surprised when I did. Gary may not have known what a bang I get out of hearing photographers talk shop.

TOP-FLIGHT CAMERA ARTISTS from around the country dotted the program's lineup. Some 75 MMPA members, many with cameras proudly slung around their necks, listened raptly to the guests.

And almost all commiserated with their seemingly identical fate in life — the unappreciative editor.

No matter where they ply their craft — Kalamazoo, Westland, Bay City, Birmingham, Mount Clemens — their plight was one.

Most newspaper cameramen feel they must suffer with editors who don't know a great picture from a dangling preposition.

When Jill Freedman, a New York freelancer who has done several fascinating books on such diverse topics as the Poor People's Resurrection City in Washington D.C., circus life and firefighting, took the rostrum she drew a variety of cheers.

The loudest came when she said she didn't like to deal with "dopey editors."

"Oh, word people," Jill rolled her eyes. "We can read. They can't see."

A roar erupted.

ANOTHER SPEAKER, Prof. Angus McDougall of the University of Missouri, had a little different slant. Himself a one-time newspaper photographer, McDougall now runs one of the country's best schools of photojournalism.

He listed three things necessary to make for a successful meld of words and pictures, giving photos solid play.

• Management commitment at the top ("We're going to be a visual communicator.")

• Photographer commitment ("Unfortunately, the ones who should be here aren't the ones who are here.")

• A designer, an art director or layout person who can make the product graphically attractive.

THEN THE MISSOURI GUEST dropped a little bombshell.

"Photographers often don't read their own newspapers. They're not on top of developing news. Until we become visual newsmen, we'll (continue) to be second class citizens."

That's when I wish that Gary would have invited me to offer a few remarks. I would have reminded the assembled group that "newspaper photographers are really reporters with cameras."

But the comment might have gotten me into hot water.

The thought passed quickly as McDougall added that "papers should have a written picture policy and get away from the 'keep-em-happy' pictures (the ribbon cuttings, the three-men-and-a-piece-of-paper, the four new club officers mugging the camera and such cliché stuff.) Who looks at them but the people in the pictures, the wives and husbands?"

GOING STALE ON THE JOB strikes photographers probably harder than other phases of newspapering. For this, McDougall suggested personal in-depth projects, "things you believe in, on your own time."

"This never can be an 8 to 5 job," he said. "But isn't it great to be doing what I'd like to be doing for a hobby?"

McDougall had a parting reminder for editors in absentia: "How do readers look at a (newspaper) page? Headlines and pictures first. Then (picture) captions. Finally words (stories)."

When editors tell McDougall, "We can't afford the space (for pictures)," Angus says he replies, "Phooey."

Take that, Mr./Ms. Editor.

ALL OF WHICH MIGHT might lead a reader to ask, "Why can't the word and picture people get together?"

Actually, much of the time they do. What photographers seem to resent most is not being in on the planning stages of hard news and feature coverage. Editors too often ignore them and instead take comfort in editorial theory that words are what people want, not a lot of silly pictures.

Naturally, that attitude infuriates the camera folks, who retreat to their darkrooms and nurse their real or imagined wounds. When they gather for seminars, like the one at the Michigan Inn, they seem to want to spend much of their time bemoaning their fates.

FORTUNATELY AT O&EN newspapers, there is a better understanding between word and picture people than at most papers. Not perfect by any means — but quite good.

We boast some extremely talented and inventive camera folks. The graphics on these pages issue after issue attest to this.

And our editors do know the difference between a great photo and a dangling preposition.

Some day someone will find a magic formula to bring joint, crystal-clear thinking to the minds of word and picture people.

Until then, I shall continue to admire and revere the often battered, often misunderstood newspaper photographer.

'New breed' photographer wants share of teamwork

By GARY CASKEY
Staff photographer

The Michigan Press Photographers Association has 122 members, men and women dedicated to a profession, individuals responding to a common cause. Every news photographer reacts to deadlines, some to daily deadlines and others to weekly deadlines. Photographers at Observer & Eccentric Newspapers have two deadlines a week. Deadlines mean stress, but they are met.

A major struggle is achieving cooperation with "word people" in story ideas, picture ideas, picture visualization and page layout.

The days when the copy boy became a photographer are over. Colleges and universities are educating competent photojournalists who have hopes of producing good art.

Although the scenario is different for every photographer at every newspaper, the job remains essentially the same: Produce art that will print well and which fulfills the job assignment.

We want more.

PICTURE USAGE is the bane of most photographers. Great pictures occur only rarely — usually when a photographer is in a situation when an element of human emotion can be captured at its peak, not something to be recreated after the fact.

Picture usage, however, can help make good pictures out of ordinary pictures. This involves a blending of talent and skills that leads to a good-looking page or paper.

The area of concern for photographers is to establish working cooperation between photographers and editors who use the art. An understanding should be reached.

Photographers need top management commitments, a plan that allows

decision making to filter down the editorial hierarchy to the people who must write, illustrate and present the news. Without cooperation, the product will suffer in appearance and reader appeal. Without management commitment, photographers may lose their enthusiasm.

A photographer must feel part of a team in order to produce art that is satisfying to all. The Michigan Press Photographers Association is devoted to improving picture usage in newspapers across the state. But we need cooperative efforts from all.

The Michigan Press Photographers Association did indeed have an educational seminar and photography contest at the Michigan Inn in Southfield. Purpose: To enlighten members through the experiences of working photojournalists from New York, Florida and Missouri.

Speakers included two freelancers, one news photographer and one well known photojournalism instructor. Their message was simple: They like photography and wanted us to like it, too.

All presented glimpses of their lives and work which help photographers improve their work, capture a different feeling for shooting pictures, renew ebullient enthusiasm and produce art that better illustrates the news.

Photographers do, too, but it is more like framing a picture than pre-ordinating the content of that picture.

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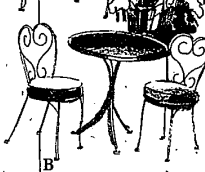


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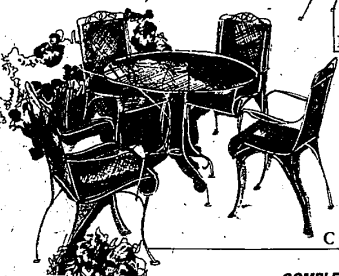


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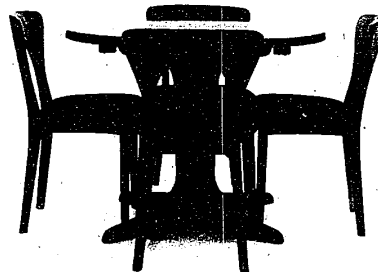


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