

m.m. memos
Margaret Miller

Panic at deadline

Life must be exciting as a member of a newspaper staff. At least that's what people love to tell me.

Exciting? Not always, I usually answer. But there can be some interesting moments. Also some occasions of pure panic.

One of those came for me a few issues back, and since I was rescued by a mighty talented member of this staff, I now can look back and laugh. In fact, I can even recount it in public.

The situation developed when the lady known as Gundella, who writes a column about witches, offered an interesting ghost story for the Halloween season.

Perhaps you read it. It involved a deer hunter lost in the north woods, and a young woman who appeared before him just as he was despairing of finding his way out. She led him to safety and then disappeared.

Then our hunter learned later that his rescuer was a young woman who had been killed in a hunting accident half a century earlier and who, with a logic I didn't quite follow, made a habit of helping lost hunters.

THE STORY was perfect for a Halloween issue, I decided, but it needed a picture to go with it. No problem — a fine cartoonist named Cliff Wirth can oblige with art to order.

Only time was short, and I had to get in touch with him fast. I did, and described the story, but there was no time to send him a copy to read.

"Just draw me a tired-looking hunter in the woods," I told Cliff by telephone, "and an ethereal-looking young woman pointing the way to safety."

Cliff obliged, and the cartoon arrived in plenty of time to use. Just what I ordered. I set it aside for the page I would put together.

But it was not too long before deadline on the Friday afternoon before the Monday publication that I finally had time to type Gundella's story to get it set for the page.

I was typing along merrily when suddenly panic set in.

The story — a true account, so I couldn't take any liberties — said the ghost was "dressed in a long coat, knitted cap and mittens." It also said she was wearing long wool stockings and galoshes.

Cliff's ghost wore a flowing white robe and was hatless. And her lower extremities didn't show at all.

RECONCILIATION obviously was needed, and the prospect looked bleak. But in tough situations I have a rescuer as good as that hunter's.

I headed for the desk of Glenni Merrillat, the Observer & Eccentric's creative services director. Well-organized Glenni was making out a list of things to do Monday. In another five minutes she would have been gone.

Could she do something, ANYTHING, to save me from a picture and story that didn't match. Well, maybe she could.

Glenni was back at my desk a few minutes later with Cliff's picture, altered just a bit. The ethereal ghost now was wearing a wool coat, buttoned up, and a wool hat and mittens.

Even Glenni couldn't put feet on her, so I took the stockings and galoshes out of Gundella's story. The newspaper's integrity was saved, and when the picture showed, it's not likely that anyone but Cliff could tell the difference.

Can you?



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