



Craig Plechura

Reporter leaves newspaper with indelible images in tow

BEFORE I GO there are a lot of people I'd like to thank and a few I'd like to boo.

Last Friday was my last day in more than eight years working for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. I'll still be writing, but it'll be for another company in another department. Advertising — working as a copywriter for the W.B. Doner Co. of Southfield beckons. I know advertising is something I swore I'd never stop to, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now.

Because I always swore advertising was just a way of getting people to buy things they don't need for reasons they shouldn't succumb to, I'm fielding my fair share of ribbing and ridicule from co-workers. They're a clever bunch.

CALLING ME Darren Stevens and asking if I'll be working for Larry like the bimbo on the old "Bewitched" TV series. Actually, I'm kinda hoping the job will be more like "The Dick Van Dyke Show." You know, where they paid Rob Petrie to sit around the office and swap jokes with Buddy and Rose Marie and make fun of Mel's bald head.

Besides, the job sounds like a lot of fun — even more enjoyable than covering a sanitary sewer special assessment district public hearing at city hall. No longer will I write the word "easement" or "ingress and egress."

I'll be selling copy Colt 45 Malt Liquor and the like. Hey, I buy beer, and no longer believe the government will provide it to the huddled masses, so I'll help the private sector get the word out.

I leave this company and journalism with many indelible images in my mind.

THE REDFORD Township mother whose college student son died in her lap after he was killed by an off-duty Detroit narcotics officer. The officer drove his motorcycle to the student's house well past midnight after hours of drinking looking to date the victim's sister. The young man told the cop to get lost, got in a fight, and was shot to death.

Stories about group homes for the retarded torched by property value terrorists who called the paper to brag about the deed. And in an unrelated story, the group home administrator convicted of torching his own facility in an insurance fraud scheme.

Parents of under-age kids crammed into a car, killed after drinking in a bar that served almost anyone who could walk in the door. They plowed into a tree on a winding road on their way back home to Plymouth.

HOBBYISTS who built replicas of Renaissance basilicas in their basement. The paint-

er who quit his photography job to pick up oil paints hoping to improve upon Mona Lisa's smile. Working for hours on end in his living room, the guy hoped to attract enough investors to fund "The Last Supper II." The latter-day Leonardo da Vinci ended up on the verge of losing his house but not his dream despite the big brush-off.

Then there was the woman who wrote a new national anthem to the tune of "America the Beautiful." Her song was "Oh, Beautiful America." She wrote the anthem to tell the world how good America made her feel — "like peach cobbler with vanilla ice cream on top."

The retired doctor recovering from a debilitating stroke who became the inventor of a better septic tank system with the motto: "Scum is the culprit!"

THERE WERE the weird-but-true stories like the avowed witch from Canton Township found guilty of bilking a Belleville believer out of a house trailer. Sick raccoons dramatically diving in droves on doorsteps a la Jimmy Cagney because they got dissembler from the family dog.

Mysterious bundles of money under motel beds claimed by a couple of people, including the tourist from Kansas who said he picked the accommodations because the motel was close enough to Greenfield Village and far enough from the city of Detroit.

I won't forget the former Southfield police sergeant who said job stress caused him to blindfold a prisoner in Northland shopping center, lead him to a stall in the john, tell the guy his time was up, and then pop a paper bag next to the man's ear for comic relief.

Or, the Redford deputy police chief, now chief, who was relieved of duty pending a drawn-out, hush-hush internal investigation over some unnamed "conduct unbecoming of a police officer." Ended up that the guy was accused of taking coins from the office coffee till. Was it worth all the ink we spilled over the affair in the newspaper or "grounds for dismissal" as the headline punned? I think not, but still very interesting.

This is the last time in a long while you're going to read how much this reporter hates to write about himself as he does it for the umpteenth time. I say bye-bye to those I've written about, those I've written for, and all the people with whom I've written and worked. If that last sentence sounds a bit awkward it's because it's grammatically correct. That's another benefit of the new job. Nobody's going to make me write that Winston tastes well as a cigarette should. Reporters, put that in your easement and smoke it. Lest I digress, I'm headed for the egress.

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comment

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'Pedestrian hit me'

Drivers' claims draw big laughs

"COMING HOME I drove into the wrong house and collided with a tree I do not have."

This is one of the statements found on insurance forms by drivers trying to explain details of an accident in the fewest possible words.

Proving that truth as the errant motorist perceives it can be funnier than fiction, another wrote, "I thought my window was down, but I found it was up when I put my hand through it."

How about, "The other car collided with mine without giving warning of its intentions." Or "I collided with a stationary truck coming the other way."

What's a poor insurance adjuster to do when he reads, "A truck backed through my windshield into my wife's face," or "A pedestrian hit me and went under my car?"

"The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him," one driver explained, obviously feeling justifiably irate.

THE ULTIMATE mother-in-law slur — "I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law and headed over the embankment."

How about this excuse: "In my attempt to kill a fly, I drove into a telephone pole."

Here's an even better one: "I had been shopping for plants all day and was on my way home. As I reached an intersection, a hedge sprang up obscuring my vision. I did not see the other car."

Imaginative and inventive are descriptions for the following:

"I had been driving for 4 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had the accident."

"I was on my way to the doctor with rear end trouble when my universal joint gave way."

"As I approached the intersection, a stop sign suddenly appeared in a place where no stop sign had ever appeared before. I was unable to stop in time to avoid the accident."



Jackie Klein

"To avoid hitting the bumper of the car in front, I struck the pedestrian."

"My car was legally parked. I backed into another vehicle."

"An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my vehicle and vanished."

"I told the police that I was not injured. But on removing my hat I found that I had a fractured skull."

"I was sure the old fellow would never make it to the other side of the road when I struck him."

"The pedestrian had no idea which direction to run so I ran him over."

"I saw a slow-moving, sad-faced old gentleman as he bounced off the hood of my car."

"The indirect cause of this accident was a little guy in a small car with a big mouth."

"I was thrown from my car as it left the road. I was later found in the ditch by some stray cows."

"The telephone pole was approaching. I was attempting to swerve out of the way when it struck my front end."

These statements are true. Names have been withheld to protect the guy for whom the light is always green and an accident is never his fault. You know the type.

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