

A daily newspaper editor's life is not "unmingled happiness"

BY DOUG ENGLISH

Fads come and go.

Some, such as topless bathing suits, never get off the ground. Others, such as the flat - chest look that prevailed in women's fashions at one time, don't last long. Still others, such as the mini-skirt, show remarkable staying power (for which I offer heartfelt thanks).

Taking pot-shots at the news media has been fashionable for many years and doesn't show any signs of waning in popularity. Like governments, we are always in season.

There has been one encouraging development. Many organizations have come to the conclusion that sitting back and blasting the media is fun, but it doesn't accomplish much. Sooner or later, organizations realize that if they want to get their message across to the public or to publicize their activities, they have to rely on the media.

Many groups have also come to the conclusion that their public image could do with a face-lifting and that the media can do a great deal to help in the operation. This realization has spawned another fad of sorts, the "communication" game. Everyone, it seems, is saying that "we're not communicating," that "we need better lines of communication."

This concern has spawned a number of panel discussions involving organizations and representatives of the news media. I've participated in at least three in recent months and came away licking my wounds. The organizations wound up licking a few wounds too. I can't honestly say that these sessions stop both sides from exchanging punches but they do result in "communication" and they do seem more useful than aimless and endless carping.

In case you think that newspapers, for example, have only

recently come under the gun, I offer a school boy's essay which was printed in a newspaper in 1910. The clipping comes from a scrapbook owned by Ford Moynes of Lindsay, a former long-time editor of the Watchman-Warder.

It goes like this:

"I don't know how newspapers came to be in the world and I don't think God knows for he ain't got nothing to say about them in the Bible. I think the editor is the missing link we read of and stayed in the bushes until the flood and then came out and wrote the things up and has been here ever since. I don't think he ever died. I never saw a dead one and never heard of one getting licked.

"Our paper is a mighty good one but the editor goes without underclothes all winter and don't wear any socks and pa ain't paid his subscription since the paper started. I asked pa if that was the reason why the

editor had to suck the juice out of snowballs in winter and go to bed when he had his shirt washed in the summer.

"Then pa got mad and took me out in the woodshed and kicked me awful hard. If the editor makes mistakes, folks say he ought to be hanged; but if the doctor makes any mistakes he buries them and people dassant say nothing because they can't read and write Latin.

"When the editor makes mistakes there's law-suits and swearing and a big fuss, but if the doctor makes one there is a funeral, cut flowers and perfect silence. A doctor can use a word a yard long without him or anybody know' what it means, but if the editor uses one he has to spell it.

"If the doctor goes to see another man's wife, he charges the man for the visit; but if the editor should go, he gets a charge of buckshot. Any college

can have a doctor to order, but an editor has to be born."

Here's another clipping from Mr. Moynes' scrapbook, dated 1909:

"If an editor were to act on all the suggestions offered to him, take the advice of those who wish him to suppress everything that they think would injure them, publish everything that tickles the vanity of individuals, no matter how silly or indifferent, he would hardly know where he was at.

"It is surprising to think how many people think they know how to edit a paper better than the editor. It is impossible to honestly edit a paper without pleasing some and displeasing others. The editor's bed is not a flowery one, or his life one of unmingled happiness."

I hope the doctors who read this column will get as hearty a laugh out of the school boy's essay as I did. As to the second clipping, I can only say "amen."

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