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3900 words

### We Just Report The News

© 1994 - Published in the Bellowing Ark Review - Nov/Dec issue, 1994

My first day on the paper, and to my mother's great delight, a smudgy photo of me appeared at the top of the Staff Box with this caption: "The Redmond Courier welcomes our youngest-ever cub reporter, Mark Finley, to the staff." Well, regarding my age, everyone else around there is two years older than water, so they could have hired Ronald Reagan and that would have been true. As to the designation of "cub reporter", it made me feel as if I was Jimmy Olsen walking into the Daily Planet.

I took a lot of ribbing about it the next few days, but no other freshman journalism major has a job worth course credits so I managed to hold my head up anyway, even when my crowd solemnly presented me with a box of *bow* ties in the Student Union.

Just to show them, I clipped on the loudest tie of the bunch, a bright yellow number dotted with little emerald pyramids, and kept it on in all my classes. It was warm out and my collar was tight and hot, but when I saw an early robin on the classroom windowsill, I remembered this was the first day of Spring and shrugged it off. Well, I wore that stupid tie for over six hours, not to mention through a surprise quiz on Mencken that had me sweating bullets. I was looking so far ahead that all I could see was the image of me proudly walking into the paper and casually taking the chair at my own desk that even after a week, I was still too impressed at having.

There's some real characters at the paper, from Mrs. K in circulation who chain-smokes Luckies despite the fact that no one can figure where she still finds them, to our editor, Blind Mel, who's eyes are as good as yours or mine but is always patting his pockets or looking on the landfill of his desk for car keys or cigarettes or the copy he was working on just five minutes ago. Naturally, Mel was the first one to spot my cub reporter look and take advantage.

"Mark," He said to me with a glint in his eye, "We all want you to fit in here, but don't you think the tie is a little much?" Well, I moved as fast as I did the night of Senior Prom when my date's dad discreetly informed me my fly was open. But Mel had stationed the staff photog, Will Threefeathers, off to the side. I heard his shutter clicking as rapidly as when he shot high school football action, freezing a spiraling ball so each successive frame showed it closer and closer, revealed the receiver's arms coming up and up until the string of negatives could make you feel how much the kid was

yearning to make the catch. All my negatives would show was how much I was yearning not to look like a fool. Mrs. K was standing in the doorway and she laughed so hard, she broke into a hacking cough that cut the laughter for a minute. They eased her into a chair and brought her a cup of water from the cooler. When she recovered, tears shining on her face, she looked over at me, said, "Lordy, put that thing back on just one more time for me, child.", slapped her hand against her thigh and they were all roaring again.

It was then that Doug Holmes, our sales manager walked in. Doug's a dour guy in his fifties who I'd only seen come alive once during that first week, when the subject of fishing came up. Otherwise, he'd spent the days grouching about the small-mindedness of local business owners or else fighting to get every ad positioned upper left. He stumped into the room, pointed a finger at Will and said, "Mr. Threefeathers, you're just the man I was looking for..."

You know, up until that moment, I wasn't really fond of Doug Holmes. As attention shifted, I surreptitiously stowed the bow tie in my desk drawer. Holmes raced on, oblivious to the hilarity that hung in the room like smoke.

"I've got a question I'm hoping you can answer, Will. What's a weyekin?"

"It's Yiddish for mother-in-law." Mel piped up, but everyone ignored him.

"It's a word used by the Nez Perce and a few other tribes." Will answered. "It means a spirit who takes animal form when visiting humans." You could tell by his

voice that he was dead serious. "My father believed that his weyekin always came to him in the form of a fox...where did you hear about them?"

Holmes scratched his head like he always did when Mel was telling him which ads would make upper left and which wouldn't.

"This may sound strange, but I've never seen anything like it in all my born days...you know I was entered in the Salmon Derby this weekend. Well, I shared a twenty-two footer with a father and son up from the Snohomish reservation. The son was arguing with the old man as we set out, couldn't believe his dad had strung cut plugs but wasn't using double hooks, and even I wanted to tell the old guy that he was being real optimistic using sixty-pound line. I been fishing off Pillar Point for twenty years and never used anything more than forty pound. Well, we weren't out there thirty minutes when the old man's Fenwick bent almost double and this fish just ripped line from his reel. We'd been trolling slow maybe a quarter mile off the Point, out where it's a couple hundred feet deep."

I'd never seen Holmes so worked up and apparently no one else had either. The whole office had stopped dead, mesmerized not so much by the developing fish story but by the transformation that had overtaken Doug. His normally bleary eyes were as bright as a kid's on Christmas morning, his stubby hands emphasizing every word.

"Well, when this big bastard struck, I thought I wouldn't get the boat turned around quick enough to follow his strike. I made it though, and I swear if I'd shut down the five horse, this fish would have been able to pull us along. The old man gave the

salmon as much line as he wanted, but was cunning how he always gained it back. He fought that beauty for over a half hour when the fish actually broke the goddamn surface! One look convinced me that if he landed it, the committee might as well call the old Indian the winner right then and there and we could all go home.

"This was the most beautiful salmon I've ever seen in my life: Eighty pounds if it was an ounce, sleek and shimmery purple as the best ones are. I've never seen a salmon fight like him...when this old king ran, it was like a torpedo homing away a foot below the surface, the water roiling out behind him. He came to the net and broke away three goddamned times! But finally you could just feel the last of the fight go out of him and he gave in to the old Indian.

"Right then, something dark flashed down out of the air. I saw it out of the corner of my eye. I've lost fish to the hawks and eagles that roost on the Point before and I didn't think twice, just pitched the closest thing, which happened to be my can of beer. I was an anti-aircraft gunner on Manila and I know how to lead a flying target, let me tell you. I would have nailed that thieving bastard too, but the kid threw out his arm against mine and the can went high. It all happened so fast! For one second, there was the violet gleam of the fish close to the surface, the snap of the hawk's wings as he banked away from us and the can of beer, looping end over end, spraying a little geyser....and the sound of that old man's voice crying out, 'No!'."

"Long as I live I'll never forget the pain in that one word. Like you'd hear from a parent seeing their kid running out in front of a speeding car. I sat and watched as the

old man carefully netted that big king. Without a word spoken between them, the boy wrapped his hands around the body, trying not to touch the scales through the net and swift as any surgeon, the old man snaked the hook out, took the fish and raised it up to the sky. He looked up where the hawk circled, cried out a word I couldn't make out, and then he let a guaranteed Derby winner swim away free into the Straits...."

Doug paused, not for effect, but in spite of himself. Simply remembering the sight of that magnificent fish swimming away had unsettled him all over again.

"The kid told me that I'd offended his pop's weyekin. That's all he'd say. The old man broke down his gear and just sat there for the rest of the Derby. I didn't catch a goddamned thing and neither did the boy. Later, when I told the old man not to feel bad, that we were all going in empty-handed...you know, just trying to make him feel a little better...he looked at me as if I was born yesterday and said, 'Of course we are.'

Will started in about the history of weyekins, how they were significant for hunters or people in a moment of choice. Listening to them, I found myself wondering if anybody but Indians really believed this stuff. I was about to ask what century they thought we were living in when the phone rang. Mel snagged it, then threw me a glance. I went over to his desk where he was filling a notepad sheet with his chicken scratching. He tore it off and handed it to me.

"Take a run over to Harborview emergency, will ya'? Some kid took a tumble...fell over a hundred feet from one of the radio towers on South Hill. They're bringing him in now."

I was instantly the complete reporter, briskly heading across the room, snagging my jacket from the back of the chair. I eyed the desk drawer with the bow tie and decided not to risk bringing it out again, even if only to bury it in my pocket and spirit it from the building.

I made such good time to the hospital that I beat the paramedics coming in from South Hill. The waiting room was nearly empty, just a red-eyed woman staring out the window, hugging a baby to her. A moment later, the place got busy. A shrouded stretcher rolled through the doors and I knew the end of the tower story already, because they weren't even running with the gurney. Behind that sad scene came a second gurney, bearing a red-faced man who moaned loudly. A big cop followed closely, gently escorting a woman who clung to the edge of the gurney, repeating softly, "Hang on Palmer, hang on." His left leg was drawn up, but the other was bound straight, swathed in a temporary emergency cast. The cop had them park the gurney next to the emergency desk and he dragged a chair over for the woman to sit down in. He turned and spoke in low tones to the nurses. Behind him, the man and woman began to argue in vicious whispers. Palmer lifted himself up on his elbows, no easy trick, 'cause they had him in handcuffs. The light revealed a dark bruise on his temple, one deep and angry red laceration streaking across his forehead. Just below the handcuff on his right wrist, I could make out a five-thousand dollar watch. The woman was beautiful but wore a haunted look, as if her every fear had been realized. I couldn't make out their words, but her face was drawn and set. She kept looking at the cop and

then around to the door a few steps away. Her eyes were filled with the same desperate wildness I used to see in my old cat Chester, whenever he was put in a car. The injured man was shaking his head as he spoke. I could make out the word, "No" a couple of times. She started to stand up and he grabbed her wrist, too hard, and the gurney rolled, bumping into the cop. She slapped Palmer with her free hand, stumbled backwards a couple of steps when he let go. She turned away and he said, "Kiki, wait. You can't leave now."

The cop was right there. His leather jacket creaked a little when he reached out towards her and she just folded back into the chair as if he'd zapped her. The handcuffed man looked up at the cop and said, "Can we talk?".

The cop soberly nodded. The injured man's voice was thin, reedy and desperate. The cop rolled him away from the emergency desk, closer to me.

"Listen. I know I've got some problems..."

The cop came in on the beat. "Speeding, DWI, reckless driving, eluding a policeman, resisting arrest...how much more you want?"

"No...wait. I admit all that. But this woman...look, you've got our I.D.'s. Do I have to tell you she's not my wife? Problem is, she's also someone else's wife. That's why I was speeding. We thought he was following us. I only tried to get away from you because I can't afford to be caught with her. Look, I hate that this happened. Honestly, I do. It's the first time she's ever cheated on him. Now, can't you just let her go?..." An

earnest, pleading look swept his face and for a moment, you could see the little boy he was so long ago, but then it evaporated beneath a seedy, sly hint of a smile.

"I should tell you, Councilman Rider's a good friend of mine. If I get one call, you can bet he's the person I'll dial. Bert Rider would want you to cut her loose. Gimme a break here, friend. Make life easy for yourself...and for me."

His voice had grown oily and wheedling. The cop's reply was icy.

"In the first place I'm not your friend, Mr. Palmer. In the second place, when I'm giving a speeding ticket to assholes like you, I know better than to expect the passengers to be related. Thirdly, I don't give a good goddamned what Councilman you might know. Last, but not least, seems to me you got a problem that's got nothing to do with what's on my list...which, by the way, you'll need more than a Councilman in your pocket to fix. But I'm going to let her go. Yeah. Only because she deserves better than being dragged down with riff-raff like you."

"What do you mean, 'riff-raff'? You've got no right to..."

He fell silent at a threatening look from the cop, who walked back to Kiki. Her face flushed with shame and relief and she almost ran towards the phones. Palmer's entire body quivered beneath his expensive, rumpled suit. I wondered how he'd taken to them slashing his pants leg to get at his injury. His hands were fists, white-knuckled.

The two policemen who'd accompanied the body in from the tower accident came back in behind the grim-faced paramedics. One of them traded a glance with Palmer's cop and walked over. He ran his eyes up and down Palmer.

"Hey, Bill. This our phantom speedster?"

"Yeah. How 'bout you? Was that South Hill?"

"Kid turned twenty two days ago. His buddy said they were just climbing the tower for a thrill. Some thrill. Somebody should have told him to be careful what you wish for."

They'd left the curtain open slightly behind them and I could see the distinct outline of the body with the sheet drawn up over the face. Palmer sullenly said, "Can we get back to our discussion, officer?" Then, feeling my eyes, Palmer looked over and sneered at me, "What are you looking at, punk?"

The big cop spun Palmer's gurney around and said, "A piece of shit. That's what he's looking at. Come on, can get this guy a room?"

I got what the police were releasing on both incidents and beat it out of there. Dusk was just coming on, my favorite time. I rode slowly back to the paper, just letting myself soak up the pearl tones in the dusky clouds. Every time I saw that shape under the sheet in my mind, I inhaled the spring air as deeply as I could.

Mel was hunched over his keyboard, but everyone else was gone. He nodded at me as I hung up my coat. I turned on the word processor and tapped out:

MAN DIES IN 90-FOOT FALL FROM ELECTRICAL TOWER

\* Seattle - A 20-year old Seattle man died Monday when he fell from an electrical tower in the South Hill area of King County. Evan Loomis was apparently climbing the tower

for thrills with three friends about 3 p.m. Monday. He died when he fell from a crossbar approximately 90 feet high, said a police spokesman.

Without pausing, I set up another header and wrote:

MOTORIST LEADS POLICE ON HIGH-SPEED CHASE \* - Tukwila

A man led police on a chase that extended to expanses of both I-5 and I-90 with speeds up to 100 mph. The 19-minute chase began at 2:45 p.m. Monday, ending by the South Hill area, where the driver lost control and crashed through a road guard. The driver suffered facial lacerations and multiple fractures to the leg, which were treated at Harborview Emergency, a police spokesman said.

The Seattle officer who had tried to stop the late-model sports sedan for a traffic violation, was joined by Tukwila and State Patrol cars. Tukwila police said the man, whose name was not released, was arrested on a felony charge of attempting to elude police.

I sat back for a moment. Then I set up a new header and wrote:

MOTORIST CLAIMS AFFAIR FUELED FIGHT WITH POLICE \* - Tukwila

A man who led police on a high-speed chase through King County said he fled because he had a woman in his car who was married to another man.

The 19-minute chase began at 2:45 p.m. Monday in North Seattle outside the Happy Rest Motel, extended to stretches of I-5 and I-90, near the South Hill area, where the driver lost control and crashed through a road guard. The driver suffered facial lacerations and multiple fractures to the leg, a police spokesman said.

The Seattle police officer who had tried to stop the silver 1988 German sports sedan for a traffic violation, was joined by Tukwila and State Patrol cars. Tukwila police said the man, whose name was not released, was arrested on felony charges of attempting to elude police, resisting arrest and driving while under the influence of alcohol.

As I wrote it again, I'd visualized a woman who would be Palmer's wife on Tuesday morning, and her cup would contain coffee, maybe tea, but the cup always shook in her hand as I imagined her eyes reading the piece. I printed out and read both versions slowly. With a sigh, I was about to take the first draft over to Mel when I heard two small taps at the third story window by my desk. I looked to see a small bird and as I did, my mind filled in larger, more magical ones. But it was just a little robin, bright-eyed, red-breasted...except this one looked me right in the eye.

I know it sounds silly, but that's the only way I can describe what passed between us and then, with the deliberateness of Woody Woodpecker, he tapped on the glass again, twice. I looked back at my copy. When I finally stood up with the second draft in my hand, the robin was gone. Mel read the tower piece and gave his usual grunt. He started on the second item, but didn't grunt when he finished, only tossed both pieces on the typesetting stack and with a mild grin said, "Why don't we just go burn a cross on his lawn?"

Two days later, Mel was hanging up his phone as I breezed in from school and he beckoned me, scribbling all the while.

"Here, Mark. Follow up on this. Report of marital murder/suicide. Shot the husband in the chest, then herself, through the mouth."

I blanched, blurted out, "You got a name?" Mel scanned his pad.

"Yeah. Davis." I felt my muscles loosen, my heart resume beating. "You're sure?" I asked. "It's not Palmer?" He looked up at me with a steady stare.

"Palmer, huh? I thought they didn't release that speeder's name...Well, don't worry, Mark. We just report the news."

I was shocked that I was so transparent. Yet I couldn't help holding my breath for some disastrous murder/suicide involving Palmer and his faceless wife somewhere out there in Seattle. The idea obsessed me for a week, came to mind occasionally through the next few days. Finally, one night it hit me that almost a whole month had flown by without the Palmers or weyekins entering my life. That was last night, in my sleep.

I was dreaming that I was shooting a little pool in Berry's where everybody from the paper goes. I heard this familiar, reedy voice and when I couldn't place it, looked around to see Palmer at the end of the bar with a guy in grey flannels. Palmer was in his cups, almost shouting, and the bartender was beginning to eye him critically. His voice carried easily to where I stood.

"Christ, Abe! She's taking me for everything...the house, the CD's closest to maturing, even the Beemer! The bitch wants to emasculate me, man! And all because of a couple of paragraphs buried in the back of that stinking little local."

I woke feeling great and remembered that in the dream I was just about to order a champagne cocktail or something equally festive. In the shower I was full of energy and when I hit the front porch the fresh air was a lift, the sense of the world around me powerful. I heard a little cheep and looked down on the sidewalk to see a robin standing there. Instead of pecking for food, it was looking right up at me. I smiled and it hopped up on my foot, then pushed off and winged away into the early morning sky. I thought about it all the way to school, finally cut my last class and went out and bought a bird feeder for my office windowsill. I hope they don't give me too hard a time about it at the paper. But then, that's not the only thing I'm hoping for.