Learning how to Report on your Friends and Neighbors:  
Going to Work in Community Journalism  
A Summer Internship at a Community Newspaper  

Washington State University  
Honors College  
Senior Option  

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Honors Thesis  

PASS WITH DISTINCTION  

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For my Honors College senior option I worked for the Prosser Record-Bulletin, a community newspaper in Prosser, Washington. I was awarded the Richard W. Gay Internship Scholarship sponsored by the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association. The scholarship is given to a journalist who is interested in community journalism as a career.

The WSNPA is an organization that works with the community papers throughout Washington to ensure journalistic integrity and quality of news reporting for the small papers in towns from Aberdeen to Zillah. The WSNPA fights for the little guy. The association does not want big metropolitan papers to take the position of media correspondent for every small comer in Washington. Their goal is to maintain community reporting.

The opportunity to work in community journalism, rather than a metropolitan daily, may seem slow in pace compared to the glamorous image Hollywood has bestowed on the larger metropolitan papers. Reporters in metropolitan papers work on a staff of hundreds of people, they are assigned a job and they do it. Reporters at metropolitan papers do not have the opportunity to see and experience every aspect of the newspaper industry.

Community journalism offers more. The opportunity to work in all facets of the newspaper business, from answering the phone in the office, writing the story, copy editing pages and assisting in the production of the press run. Community journalism allows a person who is interested in the business to see it all.

From day one I went to work at the PRB. I arrived home from Pullman the Thursday of Final’s week and Friday morning, my editor called and I went to work that evening. Little did I know, my first assignment would land me the above the fold, front-page story and photo.
The following Monday I went to work at the office. Since the Record-Bulletin is distributed on Wednesdays, Tuesdays are production day and Mondays are chaos. The first thing my boss told me was, "Monday is probably the worst day to start this job."

I was immediately thrown into copy editing the flats and tracking down last minute cut lines for pictures and confirming quotes. It was the best possible thing that could have happened to me. I didn't have to sit around waiting and I wasn't treated like a naive wet-eared college student. I was a reporter at work.

After a non-stop two days, the editor again talked to me. In addition to copy editing on Tuesday, I was assigned the school beat. This meant I had to attend all school board meetings and cover all school events for the Prosser School District, from elementary plays to high school graduation. Other than schools, I had free reign to do features and special assignments.

Learning the gossip routes of small-town coffee clubs is a technique a community journalist needs to develop. As a hometown girl, I had no problem working my way into the loop. The ladies in town, who used to offer me gum and candy when my mother and I would go shopping, now offered me a seat and a cup of coffee when I entered their stores. They knew I was working for the paper and we exchanged information like undercover spies.

My most beneficial experience this summer did not happen in the newspaper office, but in the back room of a bookstore in Prosser. I think the best way to be a good reporter is to not sit in the office, but to go out and find out what people are saying about what is going on. Each week I received a progress report of my work and an overview of the paper over a pot of coffee with the Wednesday morning coffee women. These women have backgrounds in journalism ranging from retired reporters and freelance writers, to research writers and authors of books on the history of Washington. The women would redmark my copy, give suggestions and story ideas and enthusiasm. I gained insight on what the people in Prosser like about their paper, what they wanted more of in their paper
and what they didn't like about their paper. In their grandmotherly manner they taught me more about writing for a small town than I could have ever learned from a book. The friendships of these women and their skills as journalist are what I will remember as the most beneficial aspect of my summer internship. I learned more in my 60-minute meetings on Wednesdays with these women than my editor ever in his career as of sitting in an office talking on the phone.

In the second week of my internship I was given the opportunity to cover a very emotional and enduring story. The Bookstore where I visited almost every day of my childhood was closing. I would spend the rest of my summer there for fun and for sentimental reasons. To the community of Prosser, another downtown business was lost to chain stores and shopping malls.

After working at the PRB for two weeks, the initial excitement wore off and the realities of the paper came on. The Prosser Record-Bulletin office is a unique work environment. There are no story boards or dummies for the upcoming paper, and there is no pagination. Most of the computers there are older than me. No one seems to plan in advance. As a reporter this meant I needed to keep a couple of stories on reserve each week for filler. I tried to take small events interesting and enticing for the readers each week. I wanted events and people to stand out, even if it was the 75th annual May Bazaar or a profile on someone who lived in Prosser all his life.

As the jack-of-all trades at the Record-Bulletin, I did everything from writing copy to collecting quarters from the newspaper stands. The first time I copy edited the paper, I thought the production manager was going to loose her mind. Apparently, no one ever found mistakes before. After I read the flats, I would make the corrections on the computer and print out another copy of the story. This created twice as much work for her, because she had to cut the stories out again and reglue them to the page. Sometimes, in my editing a line would be added or removed form the story and she would actually have to measure the story and figure out what to do.
I eventually figured out if I got to work before the production manager on Tuesdays, I could read the stories and edit them before she glued them to the page, making my job easier. Later in the summer, I discovered if I went to work early enough in the morning I could layout the front page and make it look decent before she got to work.

As the school news reporter I was responsible for coverage of Prosser High School’s graduation and all of the end-of-the-year events at the schools. Besides reporting on the ceremony and taking photographs, I was the section editor of a special graduation supplement to the Prosser Record-Bulletin the week before graduation. The insert included profiles on the class of 1999 valedictorian, salutatorian, and the top ten students. I worked with the high school yearbook students to get pictures of every graduate. As the section editor of the graduation insert, I designed the layout for the feature stories on the valedictorian and salutatorian.

My other jobs included listening to the emergency scanner when the editor was out of his office and reading through the weekly accumulation of press releases. I had no idea chasing fire trucks could be so much fun until this summer and I had no idea how much paper politicians waste by sending our press releases on the most insignificant matters. Fortunately there were no life-threatening fires or emergencies, but I did get to know the fire chief, county prosecutor and local sheriff department’s detectives.

The communication classes at WSU provided a good background for the preparation of my internship at the small Prosser paper and the majority of my reading material. Even the basic communication classes, such as com 101 and com 270 emphasize the importance of knowing the community you are working in, and how the demographics affect what stories you should cover and what issues are most important. For example, stories important to people in Prosser would not be important to people living in a metropolitan area. Details regarding asparagus and cherry harvest are important in Prosser because the economy of the town depends on the success of the harvest season. A story
about cherry or asparagus harvest in a Seattle paper would be misplaced and probably overlooked as commuters looked for interesting local reports on road construction.

In June, the Record-Bulletin produced a special addition agriculture supplement to the weekly paper. I was assigned to report on a man who has lived in Prosser and raised sheep for more than 50 years. This is not a story anyone would take the time to read in a large city, the topic would be laughed at and the lifetime farmer ridiculed.

Com 295 is the required introduction to media writing all communication majors must take. The book for the course, Reporting for the Media, by Fred Fedler was a great reference book throughout my internship. I would try to reread selections from the book every night to keep me on my toes. Short chapters on topics ranging from, remaining objective, avoiding stereotypes, the importance of accuracy, writing leads, grammar and accurate quotations reminded me of the little things that are so easy to forget. If I knew ahead of time I would read for work. If I knew I would be covering a speech or meeting I would read Fedler's advice. I discovered Fedler and I agreed, covering routine meetings gets boring. However covering them effectively requires background work and enthusiasm for the topic and ambition to write an interesting story. I tried to follow Fedler's advice when covering a scheduled school board meeting,"covering them effectively requires the development of some basic reporting skills: advance preparation, sound news judgment, accuracy, and ear for interesting quotations and an eye for compelling details," (Fedler 369).

Journalism 305 was the most beneficial class for my internship and no should take an internship at a newspaper without learning the skills taught in the course. The whole package of writing quality copy, making deadlines, and not missing important facts or details are emphasized in this class. The class focuses on basic skills such as preparing to and writing a story by getting background information, and asking the right questions. The strict guidelines of the class are important in order to teach students how to be accurate and ethical journalist. I constantly was going through hand outs and notes from my 330 class. A handout titled,
“News writing Checklist,” became my daily mental checklist when I wrote stories and when I copy edited others’ work. Questions for each structure of a news story are outlined.

**The Lead**
- Number of words in lead (if more than 30, rewrite)
- Is your lead a simple sentence?
- Have you avoiding any using any jargon or unfamiliar names in your lead?

**The Body**
- Have you provided a transition from your lead to your second paragraph?
- Does the second paragraph emphasize the news?
- How many words are in the body’s longest sentence?
- What percentage of your sentences contain a weak verb?
- Have you used some good quotations?
- Have you avoided sentences that would sound awkward in a casual conversation with friends?

**Finally, Check for details**
- Continually emphasized the details more likely to interest your readers?
- Emphasized the human element?
- Used specific examples and anecdotes?
- Used the normal word order: Subject, verb and direct object?

I was fortunate to have taken my journalism seminar class prior to my internship. My seminar class focused on the Federal Freedom of Information Act and the Washington State Freedom of Information Act. The information presented in the class is important to anyone who wants to be a journalist. Learning what records are accessible and how to access them gave me an advantage each time I had to get the police log, court report or city council meeting agenda. The class also taught me how to read the laws in the FOIA and how they are applied. The emphasis on learning how laws regarding to access work gave
me confidence when I attempted to gain access to public records the Record-Bulletin receives each week.

The class also showed me how blatantly public records are hidden and illegally kept from the public. I experienced this first-hand during my internship. It was my turn to go to the police station and retrieve the police log. After I asked the records officer for the log I was informed the police chief gave the log only to the editor of the paper and that I could not have a copy. Later, I found out my editor and the police chief meet on Monday afternoons in the ally between the newspaper office and police station to exchange the police log. The chief highlights all information he does not want printed with a green highlighter. My editor didn't seem to mind this method of exchanging information was not professional or ethical. Names of prominent businessmen and their children were frequently asked to be left out of the log by the chief.

Another ridiculous access situation was the weekly task of obtaining the city council meeting agenda. Every Monday, city council meetings were on Tuesdays, the paper would send someone to city hall to get the agenda. Each week we were either told the agenda was not ready or we were asked to fill out a request stating why we wanted the agenda. We knew the agenda was always ready since a mid-size daily newspaper also covers Prosser city council meetings and prints the agenda in their Friday paper.

The most practical communication course that I have taken at WSU was advanced editing and design, journalism 431. The class taught me how to take an ordinary story and make it stand out with good design concepts. Learning how to set-up headlines, use sub-heads efficiently and when to use sidebars taught me how to make any story or publication stand out.

I felt confidence of my knowledge of AP style rules and writing different types of copy, from writing a balanced story on a controversial issue, a business feature to a profile of a special person in the community. Professionalism in the work place, being prepared and meeting deadlines are skills any business-savvy person should know.
The other books I listed in my initial bibliography were used for reference books. Looking up names, Associated Press style rules, how to write obituaries, and how to think like a reporter.

One book I did not list on my initial bibliography was Dan Rather’s book, Datelines and Deadlines. The book came out in early June and was a constant source of humor and inspiration for me. Datelines is a collection of short columns written by Rather to use in his nightly broadcasts and occasionally for a small community paper in Texas. His essays inspired me to find humor in the strangest situations and to be proud to work as a reporter in a small town no one has ever heard of.

Learning how to represent the newspaper in a positive manner while working with the public watching every move, were two basic skills I learned this summer. While I might not like or agree with what the editor wrote, or how he covered issues, I still had to promote the paper in a positive manner, if not for the sake of my job, for the sake of my stories and work. I tried every day to be an approachable person people in the community would feel comfortable talking with. Learning to listen to others to develop a complete, detailed picture for myself is the most important communication skill I developed this summer. I have always thought that by learning from others, I can develop better well-rounded opinions for myself, while also learning how to express my own ideas.

Smaller community papers have an opportunity that larger, metropolitan paper do not, they can reflect the life of the community to its fullest each week. A community paper has more of an opportunity to do feature stories on odd or new items in town.

The contribution of the Record-Bulletin to society should be to tell the news of the town. A community paper should capture the essence of the people of its town in the moment, to not only report the news but to create a time capsule of the way people of the town were during that moment. Every small town has its gossip and rumors. But what really stands out are the stories. The stories of the high school legend who went on to play professional football, the story of the small farmer who won the lottery. Tragic events of
high school friends killed by reckless driving or a careless mistake are never forgotten.

The experience of working for a newspaper outside of the WSU community gave me the chance to learn more than I ever have from a journalism course. An internship is the best way to capstone a college education and draws an end to university life. As an intern you discover a love for your work, or a need for a new major. Skills ranging from making coffee for the office staff in the morning, to asking the right questions during an interview are learned. You discover how you and your work compares to other people in your field. You learn your strengths and your weaknesses while discovering where in the world you stand.

My internship experience at the Prosser Record-Bulletin provided me with an opportunity to work in a full-scale capacity in my chosen major. I learned being a journalist is more than tracking down a story and slapping the facts on paper with a few nice transitional words and phrases.

To a community, a journalist is their spy; a dependable attendant of school board meetings and city council meetings. A person who makes elected officials feel accountable and the person who writes what occurred at the meetings while everyone stayed home to watch television.

The Record-Bulletin should set an example, and represent the town in a positive manner, not dumb-down the paper for the hillbillies and rednecks. The paper should lure the agriculture researchers, the law-school-educated-farmers and the Northwestern business school businessmen of the community to put aside their copy of the New York Times and catch up with the talk around town.

My time at the Prosser Record-Bulletin was of educational value. I didn't get to work with a Pulitzer Prize writer, or even someone who knew what an AP Style manual was, but I gained confidence in my abilities as a reporter and my determination to do a good job. I learned to stand strong in my beliefs and work hard to represent the people and community of Prosser.
The idea of returning home to my little town to work as an intern for the Hoboken Prosser paper did not appeal to me much. I wanted to go to Seattle, live downtown and be sophisticated. I even had a chance to go, a job offer for the Capital Hill newspaper. I would get to meet new people, drink mochas from Starbucks every morning, lunch at cafés and dress cool. And I would be living in a big city, something most everyone who ever lived in a small town dreams of.

My family however squelched the idea. I was going to take my job offer from the Prosser Record-Bulletin and I was going to live at home. I would not meet any new people, drive in traffic or be sophisticated. I would dress casually, drink Folgers coffee and go home for lunch. No one would know my name, just call me Bonnie's little girl or the Brown girl, Brown is my mother's maiden name. Best of all, when I wasn't working I could work for my family's business and help around the house.

From day one I went to work at the PRB. I had arrived home from Pullman the Thursday of Final's week and Friday morning, my editor called and I went to work that evening. Little did I know, my first assignment would be an above the fold, front-page story and photo.

The idea of reporting on people that I have known all my life scared me to death. The fact my high school English teachers would be reading what I wrote frightened me even more. I had no where to hide and no escape. If I did a good job, people might notice, but if I did a bad job, the whole town would see my mistakes and be sure I knew about them. I was living in a glass house, with no doors to get out.

A little intimidated, and not quite aware of what I was suppose to do and what was expected of me, I had no time to be shy.
Fiddlin’ Around in Prosser

The sounds of fiddles, guitars, banjos and washtub basses, reminiscent of horses pulling covered wagons along the Oregon Trail, traveled to Prosser last weekend as more than 75 fiddlers and RVs rounded up in Prosser to participate in the 34th annual Washington State Old Time Fiddler’ Contest.

The contest, which originated in 1966, moved to Prosser after 13 years of being held in Richland. Looking for a new home, the contest moved to Prosser in search of an affordable location and more community support.

“The contest never really had a permanent home,” said Theresa Brim, chairman of the 1999 Washington State Old Time Fiddler’s Contest. Brim said the contest was ready to be passed on to a new home, preferably a small town. “The contest was lost in the Tri-Cities, it was just an event, here it’s the event.”

The 1972 and 1973 National Fiddling Champion Patsy Mercer hopes the contest finds a new home in Prosser, at least for awhile.

“I think it would be wonderful for Prosser,” Mercer said. “So far, the support has been wonderful, it’s a great event.”

The Washington state contest is a certified contest, Mercer said. The winners may advance to the national fiddler’s contest held in Weiser, Idaho during the third week of June.

Mercer said anyone can go to Weiser and play, but to win the national title they must be a certified winner of a state contest. To be categorized as a state competition the participants must play three selections in a time frame of four minutes. Of the three pieces one must be a hoedown, one a waltz and the third piece is a tune of the contest’s choice.

The three pieces represent each participant’s ability to play different types of music, Mercer said. “The hoedown is a faster piece and of course the waltz is a beautiful slow piece,” she said. The tune of choice may be a two-step, a schottish piece, a polka, fox-trot, or any other type of music, as long as it is not a hoedown or a waltz.
The contestants are judged on their ability to play their selections within the four-minute time frame, with an even-tempo, the correctness of notes and even-time, said Lewis and Thurston counties District Chairman Hazel Evey. Evey has participated as a piano accompanist in fiddle contest for more than 40 years.

"The three judges don't see or know the contest, or hear the back-up," she said. Evey said each contest is allowed two accompanist, ranging from guitars, banjos, bass guitars, washtub basses and the piano.

"The back-up is there mainly to help the contestant," she said.

The contest is divided into eight divisions, encompassing ages under 9 to over 69. Each division is divided into preliminary and final rounds. The fiddlers play the same three pieces during both rounds and are judged on the same qualifications for each round.

Despite the anxiety and excitement of the contest, most people come just to enjoy the old-time atmosphere and music.

"It's a fun time to associate with other people and have a good time," Evey said.

In the second week of my internship I was given the opportunity to cover a very emotional and enduring story. The Bookstore where I visited almost every day of my childhood was closing.

Interviewing the owner of the Bookmark, Mary, was the hardest interview of my life. With the fiddle contest I could hide in the crowd and talk to children. Mary is my mother's best friend and a close family friend. I knew the answers to the questions I was asking already. Mary was uncomfortable too at first, telling me about the financial hardships of the store. Somehow, the focus of the interview changed. I wanted to know about the people who made the bookstore, not just customers, but the regular customers who came for coffee everyday. I started to remember the thrill of going to the Bookmark to buy plastic Smurf figures as little girl and selecting sheet music for the piano. I tried to make the story
interesting for everyone. I wanted it to be more than a news story, but a sentimental and historical account of a place that was home for everyone.

I would spend the rest of my summer there for fun and for sentimental reasons. To the community of Prosser, another downtown business was lost to chain stores and shopping malls.

**Bookmark Writes Final Chapter**

*When Mary Da Corsi closes the door of the Bookmark, adorned with singing and clonking bells for the last time this summer she will leave behind more than a 40-year-old-Prosser business.*

She leaves a legacy of customer service and morning coffee with friends, that typifies the small town camaraderie of places like Prosser, to only exist in the memories of those who frequent Mary Da Corsi's coffee pot.

After all, it is the coffee, the crossword puzzles and the friendships that draw the regular crowd, every morning at the Bookmark.

"We do this every morning," store owner and manager Da Corsi said as she poured over the crossword puzzle with morning regular Ron Carlson. "We do the Tri-City Herald crossword first at home, then come here and compare. We do the Yakima Herald crossword together, it's way harder," she said.

Seventeen coffee cups neatly hang from hooks in the crowded back room of the Bookmark that is decorated floor to ceiling with piles of old books, inventory catalogs, political posters and Prosser memorabilia. The regular coffee crowd manages to fit in the small back room and find a place to sit, sometimes for hours, among the five old wooden chairs that somehow fit in the room.

The 17 coffee mugs belong to 17 different morning coffee regulars, who frequent the back room of the Bookmark for more than just answers to the crossword, but for fellowship and the latest Prosser gossip.
“Everyone brings their own cup and hangs it,” Da Corsi said. “Each cup reflects the personality of the person who hung it,”

Laughter filled the room as everyone clustered in the back room examined their mug.

“I don’t know about that,” regular Bookmark attendee Carla Willard said as she examined her Northwest Public Radio mug. Then she noticed she was wearing her Northwest Public Radio T-shirt.

Medics Steve Bradley’s mug is an advertisement for the prescription medicine, Procardia. Mike Wallace’s mug has a Far Side cartoon on it and Bonnie Glasscock’s mug is decorated with a picture of Tigger.

“She can’t sit still,” Da Corsi explained.

There are even mugs who belong to people that have been dead for years, Da Corsi said.

A mug belonging to long-time Prosser resident Lee Fiker with a red rose and her name in script still hangs from its hook, where Fiker last placed it, more than five years ago before she died. Fiker lived in Prosser with her husband and children for more than 40 years. She worked as bookkeeper at Phil’s Corner Drug and later was the treasurer for the City of Prosser. Prosser High School’s Art Fiker Stadium is named after her husband.

A beige mug with decorated with blue flowers belongs to another past Prosser promoter and supporter -- the founder of the Bookmark, Dixie. Known throughout town as just Dixie, Dixie Koening opened the Bookmark 40 years ago in the present location of The Collage ice cream shop.

“I remember when Dixie started,” Prosser resident and author Helen Willard remembered. “She loaned books out for 2 cents a day and had a few little boxes of stationary. It was just a little place.”

Willard, who has written two books on the development and growth of the Roza Irrigation project, “The Way it Was” volumes one and two, and recalled advice Dixie once gave her on a book.
"Dixie told me to buy this book, 'Drummers and Dreamers, by Click Relander.'" Willard recalled. "Dixie told me to 'buy that book, it's going to be valuable.' It's the only book ever written about the WanaPum Indians. Well, we were just starting out in the Roza and I really didn't think I had very much money to spend on books."

Published in 1956, "Drummers and Dreamers" became a very valuable book, as Dixie predicted. The book is especially valuable to Willard who has written about the Yakama Indians in her other book, "Pow Wow." Willard finally managed to find an autographed copy of "Drummers and Dreamers" and paid $50 for it. Today the book is worth much more. "Dixie was very alert to things like that," Willard said. "She graduated from Whitman, she knew her books. Just like Mary does today."

Dixie's Bookmark became much more than a 2 cent book-lending-store. The inventory grew and the Bookmark moved into its present-day location in 1962, Da Corsi said. The store expanded two times, knocking out walls to make room for the growing collection of books and gift items.

Da Corsi, who grew up in the back room of her mother's book store, said the funniest time for the store was the late 1960's and early '70s.

"We would go to shows and see all the weird stuff," she said. "All the bright colors and the dried flowers. That's when dried flowers were getting real popular. The store was booming and it was fun."

Besides books, the Bookmark is known for its variety of gift items.

"The most popular items we ever had was anything Smurf and those plastic tube things that made noise when you spun them around," Da Corsi said. "Those were biggies."

After Dixie died in 1989, Da Corsi took over the management of the store, in which she is a partner with her brother John Koenig, who works for Chapman Lampson Realty and Insurance.

Da Corsi's father, Glenn Koenig, had always worked at the Bookmark part-time, when he retired from Mullions fruit, he stayed at the store with Dixie.
“Dad would finished work and relieve Mom at 4:30 p.m. so she could make dinner,” Da Corsi said. After the death of her mother, Da Corsi added old books to the inventory to keep her father busy. “He always collected old books. He went to every yard sale, every weekend looking for books. It gave him something to do after mom died. He missed her terribly.”

When Da Corsi told her morning coffee crowd the store was closing, everyone became sentimental, she said. “We were all crying and I told them we are not going to cry and we are not going to be sad about this.”

Prosser is a small agricultural town. For the most part, people are practical and have more common sense and know-how than a lot of Ph.D. candidates. Not many people boast about themselves, that just would not be practical. When Mr. Coffman won a state award for his work with the county road department, it was worst than pulling teeth to get him to say something about it. Mostly, he wanted to show me a new snow plow and talk about clearing irrigation canals.

A third-generation resident of Prosser, there just is not much everyone does not know about Mr. Coffman. He’s a hard worker and nice guy. However, his humility did not allow him to boast when he received a state award for his work with the county road department.

Eastern Washington Road Superintendent of the Year

Cliff Coffman’s office is wallpapered with old maps of intertwined county roads and ditches. The corners are filled with cobwebs and his desk chair squeaks. The dirt on the walls could be a problem, but Coffman is too busy taking care of the dirt, dust and pavement on 1,000 miles of roads in Benton County.
Coffman's 26 years of tireless dedication and hard work with the Benton County Road Department was rewarded May 7 when he received the honor of being named the 1999 Eastern Washington Association of County Roads Supervisor of the year.

"He's active, enjoys his work and gets things done," said Coffman's boss, Ross Dunfree, the Benton County Road Department Engineer. "He's available day and night."

Coffman, who is one of the event coordinators for the annual meeting of Eastern and Western Washington road superintendents, was very surprised.

"I didn't know anything about it," Coffman said. "They kept it a pretty good secret."

Coffman maintains 50 percent of the roads in Benton County and as weather conditions change the roads, Coffman's duties change too.

"Jobs change with the season," he said. "In the winter we work long hours to get out early in the morning to get the school buses out." In the summer, Coffman and his crew have to keep the irrigation canals free-flowing.

Coffman's strong work ethic and dedication to his job and crew members are what stands out in Dunfree's mind as Coffman's best assets.

"He responds immediately to a situation when people call," Dunfree said. "He always finds a way to work out issues and get the work done."

Coffman has worked with the Benton County Road Department since 1973 and has been a superintendent in Benton County since 1982.

Every spring the students of Prosser High School are entertained with a performance by a hypnotist. One of the more popular assemblies, parents and business men stop by to watch football players dance like disco stars and sing like rock stars in their subconscious states of mind. Even when I attended PHS, no one hid in the bathroom to skip the assembly.
Students Mesmerized by Hypnotist

Sit back.

Relax.

Concentrate to unleash the power of the mind.

Hypnotist Paul Parsons conveyed this message Tuesday as he hypnotized Prosser High School students and entertained the crowd with their crazy, hypnotic activities.

"I'm the bus driver and you guys are the passengers," Parsons told the attentive audience during the Tuesday evening performance. "Just go along for the ride."

Parsons' hypnotic assembly Tuesday afternoon for high school students and Tuesday evening was sponsored by the PHS leadership class.

Parsons selected 28 students and parents to participate in his hypnotism-entertainment performance. He uses a five-minute hypnotic process to quickly transport the participants into a hypnotic state.

Once the participants were in the hypnotic state, Parsons comedic antics took over and the entertainment began. The participants lost control of the arms and legs as Parsons transformed football players into Barbie dolls and rock band members.

Parsons said he never premeditates what will happen during the show.

"I never know what will happen until I get going," he said.

One student was convinced by Parsons that a microphone stand was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen and proceeded to give the microphone stand a long kiss.

Even though the audience thoroughly enjoyed the comedic activities caused by the hypnotism, Parsons said the power of hypnotism should not be taken lightly.

"Anybody could read a book and do this," Parsons said. "But they might have problems bringing someone out of a hypnotic state."

Parsons also tries to emphasize the benefits of hypnotism while entertaining during performances.
“Hypnotism teaches people what they already know,” he said. “It just gives them subconscious suggestions. It helps them to subliminally make changes in their behavior and actions.”

This was one of the few stories I covered this summer that could be considered breaking news, even by large metropolitan paper standards. Since Prosser is 40 miles southeast and down wind of the Hanford Nuclear power plant most people are educated and prepared in case of an emergency at Hanford. However, not many people in Prosser realized they lived 40 miles directly south from a storage site for weapons of mass destruction.

**Hospital Decontamination**

The residents of Umatilla are relying on the knowledge and expertise of the Prosser Memorial Hospital and Prosser volunteer fire fighters to save their lives.

The Oregon citizens are depending on the knowledge the two emergency services in the event any of the weapons of mass destruction stored at the Umatilla Army Depot are accidentally released.

Within a 40-mile radius of Umatilla, Prosser is one of three hospitals on-call to decontaminate people exposed to the chemicals stored in Umatilla in case of an emergency. Hospitals in Richland and Walla Walla also are prepared to decontaminate people who become exposed to the deadly chemicals.

“The role at Prosser is if someone doesn’t get decontaminated in a closer area, we can do it safely here,” said PMH Emergency Manager and ER nurse Tess McCarthy.

The skills and preparation of the PMH decontamination team were put to the test Wednesday May 12, when the hospital and local emergency services tested their skills during a decontamination drill.
"It's a drill to see how well our plan meshes with other community resources," McCarthy said. "The reason this (decontamination drill) came to be is because the Army is building an incinerator to begin the burning of the chemicals in Umatilla."

The Umatilla Army Depot stores several types of weapons of mass destruction, McCarthy said. The weapons include nerve, mustard and sarin gas. The effects of being exposed to these chemicals range from breaking out in blisters to paralysis of the nervous system.

"Without the decontamination, the gases will kill you," she said.

McCarthy said the decontamination process consist of a 15 minute shower. Before an exposed person showers he must remove everything, from clothes to jewelry. After the shower dry clothes are provided and then the person is examined by a doctor in the ER.

McCarthy and other members of the PMH decontamination team worked with Army officials and the Washington State Department of Health to establish and organize the decontamination protocol for the hospital.

The most important aspect of the decontamination drill is following a carefully outlined plan.

"There is a very specific blueprint where patients go in and out," McCarthy said. "This prevents cross contamination."

As part of the decontamination drill, Prosser volunteer fire fighter set up decontamination check point stations along state route 221 to Umatilla. The volunteer fire fighters also participated as victims for the PMH decontamination staff.

"It was just like being a victim," said 17-year-old Prosser volunteer fire fighter Aaron. "They did a good job of getting us in and out."

Other volunteer fire fighters found the drill to be an excellent method of preparation, in the event an accident should ever occur at the Umatilla Army Depot.

"We looked for things to do better," said Prosser volunteer fire fighter Sean Clizbe. "This was a chance to practice, to try this or that and see what works best."

McCarthy emphasized the drill and preparation of the decontamination team is based on a worst-case scenario.
“I don’t want people to panic,” McCarthy said. “The army and Washington State have set up an excellent plan, the risk is very minimized. We (PMH) really have a handle on this.”

As the school news reporter I was responsible for coverage of Prosser High School’s graduation and all of the end-of-the-year events at the schools. Besides reporting on the ceremony and taking photographs, I was the section editor of a special graduation supplement to the Prosser Record-Bulletin the week before graduation. The insert included profiles on the class of 1999 valedictorian, salutatorian, and the top ten students. I worked with the high school yearbook students to get pictures of every graduate. As the section editor of the graduation insert, I designed the layout for the feature stories on the valedictorian and salutatorian.

What made this experience so special, is that these seniors were freshmen my senior year of high school. Knowing most of them personally, I felt privileged to cover their graduation and took special attention in mentioning a variety of people in the stories and taking pictures of everyone, not just the valedictorian — who happens to be my first cousin.

DARREL BROWN PHS VALEDICTORIAN

Earning the honor of class valedictorian is not easy. Many students can’t handle the pressure, responsibilities and time commitment it takes to balance academics, athletics and clubs. Few do it with near perfect grade point averages and still have fun outside of school. But Darrel Brown didn’t have any problems.

After four years of studying for rigorous courses such as; college prep British Literature, Spanish, Biology, Chemistry and Calculus and waking up for zero hour physical conditioning class and then attending football or golf practice, not to mention working in a lunch-hour meeting for Future Business Leaders of America, National Honor Society, or Associate Student Body, Brown is more than ready to graduate from Prosser High School.

“It’s time to move on and be done with high school,” Brown said.
Brown’s advanced placement U.S. History teacher, Mr. Brett Dillahunt found it difficult to challenge Brown in class.

“There’s nothing he didn’t get,” Dillahunt said. “It took the rest of the class up a notch and that’s makes my job fun and interesting.”

The 1999 class valedictorian is more than prepared for the competition and challenges of college and wasn’t afraid to choose one of the nation’s most competitive schools for his undergraduate degree.

Brown will attend Duke University in Durham, North Carolina beginning in August and plans to pursue a pre-med track by studying biology.

“The medical field leaves many options open at this point,” Brown said.

His interest in the sciences was sparked by the research work Brown was involved in at the WSU Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center in Prosser. There he worked with Dr. Ken Eastwell and Dr. Bill Howell studying and researching fruit tree virology.

Besides creating an interest in science and enriching his education in science, Brown said the experience was lots of fun.

Prosser High School Spanish teacher Mrs. Patricia Newhouse was not surprised Brown is interested in the science field. “Darrel likes more scientific things like math and science,” Newhouse said. “The more concrete studies appeal to him more.”

One of the main reasons Brown decided to attend Duke is the large medical school that is part of the university.

Among Brown’s other choices for college was the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma.

“I choose Duke mainly because it’s a dream school,” Brown said. “The size is just right, there are only 6,000 under grads. It’s big enough not to see the same faces every day, but the community (Durham) is small, so your not lost in the crowd.”

However, there is one crowd at Duke Brown plans to get lost in -- the Cameron Crazies.
Named after the infamous Duke University basketball court, the Cameron crazies are the students who literally camp out, in tents, weeks in advance, in order to have the best seats on the court on game night. Each tent is allowed to have 12 students and at least one student must be in the tent at all times. There even is a student body official at Duke whose job is tent monitor.

Brown had the opportunity to meet the members of the No. 1 tent for the University of North Carolina vs. Duke game on Jan 28.

“They actually camped out for a month, beginning Dec. 28 so they could have the best seats,” Brown said. “The tickets are free for students, the coach comes and brings free pizza and T-shirts to everyone camped out. It’s Nuts.”

Besides Duke basketball, Brown also looks forward to living on the East Coast. “It’s a new experience to go to a place several thousands of miles away,” he said. “It will be a good experience in learning independence.”

Even though Brown choose an out-of-state-school he doesn’t plan to be gone forever. “I plan to end up in Prosser,” he said. “Right now, I’ll just go see what’s out there.”

But for now, Brown looks forward to the excitement and energy at Duke.

“Whenever someone asks where I’m going to college and I tell them Duke they say, ‘we’re gonna see you on TV with your face painted.’”

As the school reporter it was my responsibility to attend weekly school board meetings and making me story seem as though the meeting was interesting. This meant I had to know the issues and pay attention, even if the meeting was moving into its third hour. The biggest challenge I faced covering the school board and the schools in general, is the feeling of being 17-years-old and a junior in high school every time I had to talk to my past teachers and principal. I formed a good friendship with the district’s director of curriculum and the superintendent’s secretary, which helped me immensely when I didn’t know the background on a specific topic.
As the nation watched the horror of the Columbine massacre last spring, Prosser had its own horror story. A freshman revealed to some of his friends he had blueprints of the school and the areas he planned to target with his homemade bombs. A teacher learned of the plan and action was taken. The school was evacuated and a bomb squad from Yakima searched the school.

After the matter was contained, the boy arrested, parents wanted answers and a solution.

1-800-School Safety Number

With the implementation of a 24 hour school safety hot line, Prosser school district Superintendent Dr. Ray Tolcacher, said he hopes Prosser students will be safer at school. During a special Tuesday night school board meeting, Tolcacher asked the board to approve the implementation of the Ohio-based Safe School Help line from the Security Voice Inc. security company in Prosser schools.

Tolcacher said the idea for the 24-hour hot line arose from Prosser parents at the April 27 school board meeting. The meeting occurred after Robert “RJ” Powell allegedly was caught with plans to blow up the school and everyone inside.

"After the events at the high school earlier this spring, people really wanted a help line,” Tolcacher said.

Tolcacher said the hot line is entirely anonymous. “Nobody knows who’s calling,” Tolcacher said. “The process is third-party.”

According to information in the safe school help line pamphlet, each caller is assigned a random case number. The number is used to relay the information to security voice inc. and the school. School officials then receive a transcript of the information, or in case of an emergency, a designated school official is called. Tolcacher said each school in Prosser, in addition to the district office, will have a designated official to be contacted by Security Voice.
According to the pamphlet, after a caller dials the 1-800 number, an automated voice system offers a variety of selections. A first time caller is given a case number and then leaves a message. After leaving the message, the caller is instructed to call back in three school days with the case number.

After the three school days, the caller must call back. Following the automated instructions on the hot line, the caller enters the case number and listens for further instructions. If the school responded to the message from Security Voice, there may be questions to answer. After answering questions, the caller may be asked to call back in another three days, if more information is needed.

"If anytime, anyone sees drugs on campus and doesn’t want to report it because they are afraid their friends will find out, they can call this number," Tolcacher said.

Security Voice, INC. is a national company based in Columbus, Ohio.

The cost for the hot line was not known at press time Tuesday.

More important than maintaining an initial source in a small town, is fairly reporting a story when you know every person in the story. I learned to have confidence and not to step down when interviewing people I had known my entire life. Sometimes interviews were easy and took place as the source and I sipped mochas. Most the time it was hard, to not let a good friend's bias toward a situation affect how the story turned out. A good friend of mine from high school spent the spring semester studying abroad in Central America. As I interviewed her about her travels and experiences in Central America, she kept referring to everyone and everything in the United States as greedy monsters and Nazis. It was hard not to judge my friend as I interviewed her. The best way to do that was to just interview her and not be her friend at that moment.

Even though the interview was uncomfortable, I learned so much from my friend and how she has developed as a person. Once a girl who drove her dad's Porsche to school,
In the world of programmable VCRs, e-mail and a new Star Wars movie it's hard to imagine a college student would sacrifice the luxuries of the modern world to spend a semester handwriting term papers, taking bucket showers, living with no telephones or an English speaking friend for miles. But that is exactly what Beth Poteet did to study and experience world economics, history sociology and Spanish from a hands-on perspective.

The 1997 Prosser High School graduate choose to spend a semester in Central America as part of Whitworth College's semester study program. Whitworth, a small Christian college in Spokane, offers the trip every three years to students. Poteet and 20 other students traveled to Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico to study the people of Central America and offer their services to people in need. Poteet, a peace studies major, said the trip added to her interest in social work while enriching her college education.

"It's important to have book knowledge, but there's something experience cannot deny," Poteet said. "It gives you validity."

Poteet's semester started in an intensive-language school, where she practiced her Spanish three to four hours a day. After the language school, the students were split up, everyone went on their own to assigned locations. Poteet stayed in La Majada, a village in Honduras with only 111 people. For more than three weeks, she survived in an open-air house, with no electricity. The house did have running water, but no showers or baths. To wash, Poteet took bucket showers.

"People there seemed more concerned about each other and not things," she said. "I really enjoyed the sense of community and how the community is put before individuals."
While in La Majada, Poteet assisted a medical brigade from Mississippi by translating for the doctors.

Next, she went to Managua, Nicaragua. Nicaragua was a completely new experience in many aspects for Poteet.

“Nicaragua as many problems,” Poteet said. “The main problem is that it's the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.”

The huge amounts of people living in poverty have led to large amounts of people living on the streets.

“They have a huge problem with street kids,” she said. “There are many abandoned buildings from an earthquake that have become homes for people.”

In Nicaragua, Poteet was reunited with the rest of the Whitworth students to volunteer at a detoxification camp for young boys.

“The main drug addiction in Nicaragua is glue-sniffing,” she said. “The purpose of the camp is to teach the boys a skill they can use to make money, such as making hammocks or curtains.”

Poteet also experienced the violent associated with the gang lifestyle in Nicaragua. She credits the gang lifestyle and increased violence to the poverty of the people and the government's lack of help or compassion to aid the people. One night during dinner with friends, Poteet said gunshots were fired nearby.

“I never felt scared,” she said. “It's their reality, it happens everyday.”

Poteet's semester ended in Mexico City, where the group underwent a week of debriefing.

“It was really difficult coming back to the states,” Poteet said. “The experience reconfirmed a lot of things for me and I'm trying to figure out where my place in society will be.”

Poteet has figured out one thing she hopes to actively pursue as a result of her experiences in Central America.
"I hope to change the world," she said. "What I hope to do is move people from apathy to activism."

My other jobs included listening to the emergency scanner when the editor was out of his office and reading through the weekly accumulation of press releases. I had no idea chasing fire trucks could be so much fun until this summer and I had no idea how much paper politicians waste by sending our press releases on the most insignificant matters. Fortunately there were no life-threatening fires or emergencies, but I did get to know the fire chief, county prosecutor and local sheriff department's detectives.

**New Sheriff in Town**

*After a four-year absence, the Benton County Sheriff's office has returned to Prosser. A new office at 600 Eighth St. was opened last week by Benton County Sheriff Larry Taylor. Taylor said he hopes the citizens of the new full-service office will be helpful to the people of Prosser.*

"Instead of driving 30 or 40 miles for an errand that maybe takes 10 minutes, the people from the West end of Benton County can now receive service here," he said.

*The new Benton County Sheriff's Office shares space with the Prosser office of the Benton-Franklin Transit system.*

"I would like to publicly thank the Benton-Franklin Transit family for financially assisting the county to utilize this space," Taylor said. "They made us very welcome."

*The Prosser office will handle all civil matters, such as orders of restitution and protection, unlawful harassment and all Prosser District Court matters. The office also will issue gun permits and do a full crime check on the Washington State criminal data base.*

*These over-the-counter matters will be taken care of by the administrative assistant, Karen Steinbock. Steinbock previously worked for the Benton county Sheriff's Office in Kennewick.*
The office at some point will be home-base for the 32 Benton County Deputies. Previously, the deputies had to use the Prosser Police Department's offices for investigations and interviews with victims.

"I'm very excited," Taylor said. "I think it's important to have an office to serve and meet all the needs of people here. It's long overdue. As sheriff it's been one of my primary goals to have an office in Prosser again."

In a small town entertainment options are scarce for those not interested in watching football and basketball games on the weekend. If you can't find your own entertainment, or have the money and a car to drive 35 miles to the Tri-Cities, you might find entertainment in smoking pot or drinking with your friends. A sad way to spend time and money, Prosser has a drug problem.

Drug Bust

A drug bust at 312 W. Wine Country Road netted a circus variety of drugs, including an estimated $105,000 worth of Methanphetamine on Thursday.

Grandview assistant police Chief Armando Martinez said Heriberto Garibay Birrueta, 25 years old, was arrested on charges of possession of Methanphetamine with intent to deliver and alien in possession of a firearm.

Grandview police were assisted by the Yakima County narcotic task force during the raid. Sgt. Doug Henitz form the Yakima County narcotic task force said the raid was a result of a two-week investigation of Birrueta's drug operation. A warrant was issued and the two agencies raided Birrueta's travel-trailer Thursday afternoon at 2.

Officers found 394 grams of Methanphetamine, nearly one pound, with an estimated street value of $150,000.

"What we found inside was far more than user amount," Sgt. Henitz said.

In addition to the Methanphetamine, 747 grams of Marijuana, with a street value of $2000 and 1.5 grams of Heroin were seized.
Interlock Story

The modern judicial system of the United States has taken mandatory sentencing to a new level with the advent of the ignition interlock device.

As of Jan. 1, defendants selecting deferred prosecution as their sentence for a driving under the influence citation, are required to have an ignition interlock device installed in all cars they drive. Also, a stipulation appears on their drivers license indicating the defendants may only drives cars with the ignition interlock device.

Benton County District Court Judge Robert Ingvalson said the interlock device is a helping tool in the judicial process.

"The interlock device is not punishment," Ingvalson said. "It's protection."

An ignition interlock device is similar in size to a radar detector or cellular phone, said Byron Hicks of Ignition Interlock of Washington. Hicks said the interlock device is a breath analyzer that is wired into the vehicle's ignition and prevents the driver from starting the car if he has had too much to drink.

After six months of trials and tribulations, the benefits and drawbacks of the interlock ignition device are coming to light.

City of Prosser Attorney, Joe Schneider, who has recommended deferred sentencing for many cases, said problems exist with the interlock device.

"It has not proven to be reliable yet," Schneider said.

While the initial benefits of the device include freeing up jail space and self-regulation of the defendant's drinking and driving, other problems caused by mechanical malfunctions are now the focus of the interlock device.

Tina Bouvier of Autoworks in Kennewick said many of the problems with the interlock device are caused because the device is calibrated for pure breath. "If someone has been smoking, chewing gum or using mouthwash the device will lockup," Bouvier said.
Other items such as passengers wearing perfume or cologne will also cause the device to shut down. Bouvier said one customer's interlock device locked up while he was cleaning the inside of his car windows with Windex.

After the car locks up, a computer chip inside the interlock device records the violation. After locking up, the person has another chance to breathe into the interlock in 15 minutes. If the person has not been drinking, Bouvier recommends the person rinse out their mouth and take several deep breaths. If the device again detects alcohol, or any other substance, in the person's breath the car's engine remains locked up.

According to information in the Ignition Interlock of Washington's informational pamphlet, during the first 10 minutes and then at least once an hour while the car is being driven, the law requires the interlock device maintain a rolling retest. A warning will sound and the driver must breath into the device. If the driver passes the test, he keeps driving until the next test. If the driver keeps driving and does not take the test, the law requires the horn start honking. After several minutes, if the horn honking, if the driver does not either pass a test or turn of the ignition, the interlock records a violation reset condition.

If a violation reset condition is recorded, the interlock device will shut down the car within a period of five days, meaning the car cannot be started or driven at all. The driver must call his interlock provider and schedule an appointment to get the device reset. The company providing this service will charge a penalty fee for the service of resetting the device. Also, the interlock provider is required by law to notify the driver's probation officer of the offense.

In June, the Record-Bulletin produced a special agriculture supplement to the weekly paper. I was assigned to report on a man who has lived in Prosser and raised sheep for more than 50 years. This is not a story anyone would take the time to read in a large city, the topic would be laughed at and the life-time farmer ridiculed. In Prosser, however, it was just a story on Mr. Steelman and his sheep.
Cliff Steelman

One of the noblest professions since the beginning of time has been the work carried out by the Shepherd. Soft-spoken and kind, they have watched their flocks with the same level of seriousness a doctor uses in heart surgery. No church is complete without at least one picture of a young shepherd looking over a pasture to watch the flock or a painting of a young shepherd carrying a lamb in his arms.

Even though they have been portrayed since the beginning of time no one could imagine a shepherd, or any child who ever dressed as a shepherd in the Christmas Eve church program, without a crook to maintain his flock.

Most people are familiar with crooks, not people who vandalize homes, but the really big canes with a big hook on the end, if they just think a little bit. Linus carried one in “Merry Christmas Charlie Brown,” Little Bo Peep never would have found her sheep without her’s and maybe if Mary had one that pesky lamb never would have followed her to school. The idea anyone could manage a flock of sheep with one of those loopy-looking devices makes Cliff Steelman laugh.

“They’re huge, cumbersome and awful,” Steelman says of the typical image of a shepherd’s staff.

Steelman would know, he has made his crooks for most of his life and has traveled to Wales to learn from the masters.

“I learned by trial and error,” Steelman said. “It was mostly error.”

Steelman maintains a flock of sheep along the banks of the Yakima River in Prosser. His roaming flock of Scottish Black Face sheep create a picturesque storybook scene as people cross the Sixth Street Bridge. He does not use a crook to manage his flock, but has invested many hours into learning the craft and creating crooks that are far too beautiful to swat a sheep with.
His self-taught hobby has turned into every possible storage space he has available into a place to stash his huge collection of sticks and horns, the necessary items for the construction of a crook.

A crook consist of three major parts; the shank, stick and tip. The shank, the curved or top part of the crook, is the most detailed and intricate aspect of the crook. The shank consist of a nose, the end of the shank, and a head, where the shank ends its curve.

Steelman said the relationship between the nose and head needs to be balanced, so the shank won't appear as though it's falling over.

Shanks are made from many types of material, sheep, elk or moose horns, ivory and wood are just a few examples.

When Steelman decides to begin a new crook, he first boils the horns for 30 minutes and then presses the horns flat in a five-ton press. When he is ready to carve into the horns, he uses a heat gun to soften the area he is working on.

Steelman said the hardest horns he ever tried to carve were horns from a water buffalo. His favorite material to carve is white punk

“It's like sea foam candy,” Steelman said.

The stick of a crook is similar in appear to a cane, but very light in weight. The part of the crook where the shanks meets the stick is called a marriage.

“A good marriage is exactly parallel from all angles and the parts are the same size,” Steelman said.

Since the stick needs to be lightweight, it is made from very light materials, such as tree roots, suckers and water shoots.

Steelman has discovered high quality sticks are hard to find and competition is fierce.

“If you see a good stick, the best time to pick it is now, “ Steelman said of his stick-searching adventures. “Because it won't be there later.”

Finishing off the crook at the end is the tip, the part of the crook that touches the ground.

Steelman said tips usually are made from sheep horn.
When the hours invested into gathering the material to make the shank are done, the homs boiled, flattened out and carved, then combined with the right stick by a marriage and finished off with the tip, Steelman said the most important aspect in judging the quality of a crook is left.

"It has to feel good in your hands."

I wrote this next piece as part of the application process for the Washington State Newspaper Publishers’ Association scholarship I received. A moth after finding out I won the scholarship, I received a large envelope from the WNPA. Inside the envelope was a copy of their monthly publication, “The Washington Paper” with a sticky note attached. The note said, turn to page four. On page four was a selection from my essay—in print and published. It was the biggest surprise and honor of my life.

Where Everybody Knows Your Name; The Value of Community Journalism

Working for a community newspaper takes a special devotion and interest not every journalist possesses. Despite excellent writing skills and well-developed investigative talents, a person who thrives at a metro paper may not have the instincts and tact required to succeed at a community paper.

I am a second-generation citizen of the small eastern Washington community of Prosser. As a little girl, Thursdays always were special because that was when the Prosser Record Bulletin was delivered. As a little girl I did not know why the paper was such a big deal, but I knew everyone wanted to be the first to read it and see the news inside the big, black and white pages.

What was ironic about the news in the Prosser paper is that it never really was news. As the paper only is published once a week, the news rarely was new. Citizens of a small town know through the morning coffee clubs who is doing what and what is going on. Sometimes I think people read the paper only to see whose pictures are in it.
Most people in small towns read a mid-sized daily paper. The paper covers their small towns briefly, and sometimes local high school sports receive some coverage. A small town paper devotes itself to the events of the town, whether it's a little league baseball and varsity football games or a holiday dance at the senior citizens' club.

Reporting for a community paper would require more than just sharp people skills and a good grasp of Associated Press style. A person entering community journalism needs to belong to an exclusive group of people who have lived in small towns their entire lives and know the politics of small-town city councils and school boards. To burn a source in a small town would be the end to a reporter's relationship with the community.

Learning how to represent the newspaper in a positive manner while working with the public watching every move, were two basic skills I learned this summer. While I might not like or agree with what the editor wrote, or how he covered issues, I still had to promote the paper in a positive manner, if not for the sake of my job, for the sake of my stories and work. I tried every day to be an approachable person people in the community would feel comfortable talking with. Learning to listen to others to develop a complete, detailed picture for myself is the most important communication skill I developed this summer. I have always thought that by learning from others, I can develop better well-rounded opinions for myself, while also learning how to express my own ideas.

Sometimes I had to express why I thought a story should or should not run. For instance, I thought I story on the work of the organization Habitat for Humanity in Prosser was more important and timely than a story about the high school football team going to football camp. I won out, but the next week the editor ran a two-page photo essay of football camp.
**Habitat for Humanity**

Some say it takes a village to raise a child. Habitat for Humanity has taken this a bit farther. They build villages to raise a child.

With more than 60 homes built by Habitat for Humanity in the Yakima Valley, the organization has undertaken a two-home building project in Prosser. One of the houses, is the largest home ever to be built by the Yakima branch of Habitat for Humanity.

The six bedroom, two bathroom house will belong to Veronica Walle and her husband. When the home is finished later this summer, their eight children will no longer have to cram into their small home in Sunnyside that had one bathroom for all ten members of the Walle family.

The proximity of the Walle’s new house couldn’t be better for a family with eight children. Located on Ellen Street, the children will have the E.J. Miller Park and Prosser City Pool for entertainment. Not to mention, a quick walk to Keene-Riverview Elementary school.

“I’m really excited and my kids are excited,” Walle said.

The Walle’s began the process of applying for their Habitat for Humanity house almost one year ago. They attended a general meeting in Mabton, where more than 20 families attended.

“We really weren’t worried about the amount of people at the meeting,” Walle said. “We really thought we faith in our Lord. We knew we would get the house by our faith.”

Faith gave the Walle’s an opportunity to have a home, but they will have to contribute 500 sweat hours into the building of the house and payoff their mortgage to Habitat for Humanity.

“After our 500 hours, we won’t stop helping,” Walle said. “We will help the other families with their houses.”

The mortgage the Walle’s pay will fund another Habitat for Humanity house.
The construction supervisor for the Prosser project, Buck Hall, said the contributions the families make toward the building of their homes is the greatest is what separates Habitat for Humanity apart from other service organizations. "The families are involved in order to take the house," Hall said. "For me, that's the most important and fascinating aspect of Habitat for Humanity."

Since the Prosser project began in April several groups from all over the United States have contributed to the building of the homes. Hall said two college groups and several high schools spent their spring vacations in Prosser tearing down the old house that used to stand on the site of the two new lots. Students from Villanova University in Pennsylvania and the University of Washington were among the college groups working during their Spring Vacation. Seattle area high school students from Eastside Catholic and Seattle Prep also helped. The groups not only put many hours into working on the house, Hall said, but also pay $150 to Habitat for Humanity and pay for their transportation, food and lodging.

Recently, 17 members of the Des Moines United Methodist Church camped out in motor homes and showered at the Prosser High School while working for one week on the Prosser Habitat for Humanity project.

The group from Des Moines, a suburb south of Seattle, has been volunteer time each summer to Habitat for Humanity projects in the Yakima Valley for ten years. "We've worked in almost all the Habitat homes in the Valley," said Ralph Black. "You get to know good people from your church and get to do some good."

Black is among five members in the Des Moines group that included five retired Boeing engineers. Members of the group joked a house is built like a Boeing 747 airplane.

"We try to be a little precise in the building of both," said former Boeing engineer John Bolender.

Hall said even though more than 60 homes have built by Habitat for Humanity, he still is astonished by the tireless work of the volunteers.
“It’s amazing to me how much you can accomplish in one day, one week and one month, doing one thing at a time.”

Smaller community papers have an opportunity that larger, metropolitan paper do not, they can reflect the life of the community to its fullest each week. A community paper has more of an opportunity to do feature stories on odd or new items in town. I doubt I would have had the opportunity to write the following story for the Seattle Times or the New York Times and I had way too much fun investigating, interviewing and reporting on this story to cry about having to live at home all summer.

BINGO

Bingo.

Among rows and rows of sheets with the numbers 1-72 running up and down and back and forth across them, concealing table-top cluttered with dozens of every color of dauber on Earth, it is the only world spoken that can break the intensive concentration comparable to a world-champion chess match.

Bingo.

A phenomenon sweeping the nation, that takes grandmothers from the kitchens to be held hostage by a jungle gym of bouncing balls, Bingo has left its mark in Prosser. Caught in the phenomenon, the Prosser Senior Center has regularly held Bingo nights on Wednesday even before the farmer’s dog had a name.

Each Wednesday, beginning at 6 p.m. the Prosser Senior Center host its Bingo Night. Senior Citizens are not the only people in attendance, the room fills with people of all ages drawn to win cash prizes in the 29 different types of Bingo games.

“It’s an adrenaline boost,” Jill Fleming said. “If you don’t drink, where else can you go?” she asked.
“It’s a night out,” said loyal PSC Bingo participant Loretta Harpster. “The money isn’t bad though.”

The social aspect draws a crowd, but it is the cash that keeps players coming each Wednesday for more.

“Bingo is relaxing,” said Inez Stacy. “Of course, I like to win,” Stacy added. Stacy became hooked on Bingo after winning $500 her first time playing.

The wild nights of Bingo couldn’t take place if it wasn’t for the help of volunteers who set-up, clean-up, serve drinks and food and of course, call the numbers.

Pam Stovall and Kathy Brooks regularly volunteer their Wednesday evenings to calling out numbers to an audience hoping for the right number to complete their Bingo.

Brooks admits she is a Bingo junkie, right down to her Bingo bag and dauber addiction. Just as in any sport, Bingo has its own vocabulary and equipment that comes along with the sport.

A dauber, for those unfamiliar with the Bingo lifestyle, is a marker-like object used to mark the numbers called on a Bingo card. Daubers come in every possible color imaginable, from purple to blue.

“Having a selection of daubers keeps you from being bored,” Brooks said.

Apparently, no one uses just one dauber. This is where Bingo bags come in.

That’s right, a Bingo bag.

A Bingo bag, Brooks said, is a tote-bag item with pockets created to hold daubers on the outside and all necessary Bingo items on the inside.

Brooks said items in her Bingo bag are Ibuprofen, sinus tablets, a glue stick - to actually glue one’s Bingo sheets together, a list of lucky numbers and most importantly, lucky charms.

“It’s kinda like voodoo,” Brooks explained about the lucky charm fetish of many Bingo players.
Looking around the table tops and underneath the tables, a watchful eye will find stuffed elephants crammed into purses and horseshoes with four-leaf-clovers clasped into the hands of Bingo players.

Creativity comes into work when structuring an evening of Bingo. Regular, down the row Bingo is passe’. Games where kites and bow-ties are drawn by dauber ink are the norm at the PSC.

One of the most popular games is the Speedy Gonzalez game. The point of this game is for the caller to read off the numbers as fast as possible. During Speedy Gonzalez a pin could drop, be heard and no one would notice as they scrawled marks cover Bingo sheets faster than a speeding bullet.

Another popular game is Bonanza. To win in Bonanza, a player needs to lose. The worst card, the card with the highest amount of uncalled numbers wins.

Bingo, however, isn’t just about lucky numbers, ink-smeared fingers and voodoo, mostly it’s a night out and a chance to make some money.

“A lot of women have husbands who work in the evening, or are widowed, they come to play for the recreation,” Brooks noted.

For others, it’s a way to stretch their monthly income.

“Some people here have a fixed income,” Fleming said. “For them, it’s the slight chance of increasing their income. Some women even come in desperation, to win the $2000 to pay their sons’ tuition.”

Community papers get to tell personal stories to people they know. A community paper does not have to guess what its readers want, a small town paper wants small town news, not beauty shop gossip, but news important to the town. A small town paper is much more than who went where, or whose children are in the school play. A paper in a small town can be the most important part of the town, if it’s done right.
During the summer and early Fall the Prosser Farmers' Market is more than the place to be seen. It is the highlight of socializing during summer vacation. Every Saturday the city park is full and everyone in town comes to eat breakfast served by the Boy Scouts, buy fresh produce and to order some of Stacey Ballard's flowers.

**The Belle of Farmers’ Market**

*Mary, Mary quite contrary.*

*How does your garden grow?*

*With silver bells and cockle shells and pretty maidens all in a row.*

*Prosser has its own Mary -- Stacy Ballard, and her flowers are the talk of the town.*

*Don’t be confused, this modern-day flowers mistress doesn’t wear a big puffy dress or don a large nursery-rhyme bonnet. This petite blonde is all about business.*

*Saturday mornings, June through October, Ballard wakes up at 5 to begin picking, selecting and cutting flowers from the dozens of perfect rows that divide her gardens into neat aisles any grocery store owner would envy.*

*After examining the rows of pink, yellow, purple, rose, white and orange flowers, she cuts only the flowers with the fullest blooms and then loads the back of her diesel-engine pickup to set up shop at the Prosser Farmers’ Market.*

*After the drive into town from her parent's home on Richards Road, Ballard begins unloading her flowers, that is if she isn’t swamped by the customers who have been awaiting her arrival.*

*“I have people waiting here before I get here,” Ballard said as she took a break from her duties of arranging flowers, answering questions and visiting with customers and friends.*

*“My customers are very faithful,” she said in proud-mom manner. “They show up every week.”*

*One of many loyal customers is Deena Hector.*
“I love her flowers,” Hector said simply.

“She’s so gentle. She ties a little wrappie around them, then you just cut them like she says. They are just perfect,” Hector exclaimed.

“She’s better than Martha Stewart.”

Ballard, however, modestly gives credit to the flowers.

“I don’t think I can make them not pretty,” she said.

Ballard has always enjoyed flowers, but her interest in arranging and growing flowers stemmed from her job at the Flower Huis in Prosser.

“I worked at Flower Huis my senior year of high school, then they closed,” she explained. “I was a little lost soul with no flowers.

So, in order to maintain her love of flowers and to earn money for college, Ballard decided she would grow her own flowers and sell them at Farmers’ Market.

“The first day I came (to Farmers’ Market), I didn’t even make enough money to pay the small fee.”

That first day was last summer, and now business is blooming.

“I sell out every Saturday,” she announced. “Come early if you want flowers.”

Ballard begins growing her plant starts in February, in Stu and Clare Padelford’s greenhouse. As soon as the weather is warm enough, she transplants the more than 20 varieties of flowers at her home.

Ballard said she does have one gardening trick that ensures beautiful flowers: Rabbits. Besides flowers, Ballard also sells rabbits throughout the summer. The bonus the rabbits provide is the fertilizer they produce for the flowers.

“The rabbits are part of the business,” she said.

Also, part of the business are dried flowers, such as status, babies’ breath and dried roses. Her most popular flowers are monaritia, similar in appearance to sunflowers but smaller, linania, veronica and arctotis--purple daisies.
Apples are another part of Ballard's business. Beginning in August, Ballard's plans to have apples ready for sale, in addition to the rabbits and flowers.

"I'm known for my strange Japanese varieties I make people try," she said. "People try them and they love them."

Ballard's business is a dream come true; she is surrounded by beautiful flowers as she works every day. But it is not the flowers or the money for college that makes her happy.

"I like it," she began, "because I get to meet a lot of people I wouldn't meet anywhere else."

Ballard said every Saturday she listens as people remember a corsage from a high school dance, a pedal from a wedding bouquet, or flowers from their own gardens years ago, after looking through her flowers.

"A lot of people go into this remembrance thing," she said. "I hear all these stories, 'we grew that,' or 'we had these when I was a little girl.'"

The stories from customers and onlookers, and the social, hometown Prosser environment of the Farmers' Market are what keeps her coming back.

"I like it here because I'm a people person."

The contribution of the Record-Bulletin to society should be to tell the news of the town. A community paper should capture the essence of the people of its town in the moment, to not only report the news but to create a time capsule of the way people of the town were during that moment. Every small town has its gossip and rumors. But what really stands out are the stories of the people in town. The stories of the high school legend who went on to play professional football, the story of the small farmer who won the lottery. Tragic events of high school friends killed by reckless driving or a careless mistake are never forgotten. This is a story compiled from many sources that every 16-year-old in Prosser heard from the driver's education teacher, as the site of the accident in the following story in a popular party spot on top of a 75 degree graded hill.
Prosser Tragedy

One of the worst tragedies in city of Prosser history occurred twenty-five years ago occurred Wednesday, June 30. Five Prosser men, gave their lives as they reached out to help their neighbors on the Horse Heaven Hills.

This exert was taken from the story in the July 4, 1974 Prosser Record-Bulletin and from Paul Fridlund's book “Changing Times.”

The Horse Heaven District No.5 truck No.1 driven by Dale Mercer, spent the day of June 30 driving up and down Ward Gap Road working to maintain an 800 acre fire the engulfed the Horse Heaven wheat fields. In mid-afternoon the truck was headed up the grade, near the summit, about 200 yards above the Richman elevator when horror struck.

Other vehicles parked on the right side of the narrow road forced the fire truck to the left of the road. When the heavily loaded fire truck, carrying 11 men and a load of water moved to the left, the down slope, side was reported to have given away beneath the weight of the truck, causing the disaster.

Phil Bell, who was riding in the truck, described the accident.

“I saw and felt the truck start to go... I just leaned out and back and jumped clear and the truck’s forward momentum carried it past me...it went very fast -- bam, bam, bam, bam -- it rolled over five times. I think and real fast, scattering guys all the way down the steep slope. The truck rolled over at least six of the guys, maybe more. I think Gene Roseberry, Dave Bayne, Ron Riggs and Don Offield were all on the right side of the truck, but somehow they got caught and it rolled on them. Rick Piper and I were near the back and jumped free.

Glenn Smith was on the left side and got run over. John Barber was in the cab on the right side next to the door and he was thrown out. I think Wayne Mercer rode the truck all the way down inside the cab -- he was between his dad and John, but he was able to get out. Rod (Riggs) jumped or was thrown clear. Dale (Mercer) was trapped inside the truck. I ran down to the truck to help Dale out.”
(Other eye witnesses to the accident have credited Phil Bell with an act of super-human strength when he wrenched and tore the truck door to free Dale Mercer.)
There were 20 or more persons who rushed to the scene to help the wounded and remove the dead.
Gene Roseberry, Ron Riggs, and Glenn Smith died at the scene of the accident. John Barber, Don Offield and David Bayne were taken by an MSAT helicopter called in from Yakima. Offield died on July 4, 1974 in a Seattle hospital. Barber died two weeks later and was buried in the East Prosser cemetery on July 18.

I ended my internship in the same way I began, fast. My last day was the same schedule as my first working day, press day. I arrived early to arrange my pages and check for errors. As I visited with the office ladies who were my new friends, everything seemed so final. Just as the paper was to be finished they brought out a cake for me and flowers. Not only did I have an educational summer where I learned about my friends in town, but I made new friends on a whole new level - A professional level. While most people will still call me Bonnie's little girl, or the little Brown family baby, they know I am much more.
Bibliography


