

DFO checks out (Aug. 17, 2017)

In 50 years, I've come full circle. I graduated from high school at age 17 in '67. Now, I'm 67 in '17. And I'm retiring. This will be my last column. Forty-seven years in the news biz ends today. So let's bring out the final set of dots.

Three dots

I became an admirer of three-dot master Herb Caen of the San Francisco Chronicle while growing up on a 500-acre dairy in rural northern California. My Aunt Beatrice subscribed to a newspaper that carried his column ... (By the way, I believe that my teen years on my Uncle Manuel's dairy shoveling cow manure prepared me for a career of editorial and column writing) ... I was amazed that Caen could cram so many different items into a single column. I didn't know the people he wrote about. But he made me care for him ... His mantra? If you don't understand one item, go to the next ... Caen's tight writing and word play were dazzling. He copied the style of three-dot originator Walter Winchell. And I copied Caen. I copied so well that I won a memorial award given in his name for tidbits column writing in 1999 from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. I never cared about newspaper awards after that. I'd grabbed the brass ring ...

A wandering man

In my 47 years of newspapering, I've worked for six papers in the three states and for the four main publishers in the Inland Northwest: Duane Hagadone (Kalispell Daily Inter Lake, 1977-82), Butch Alford (Lewiston Tribune, 1982-84) and Bill and Stacey Cowles (Spokesman-Review, 1984 through today). I owe all four of them in different ways for enriching my career ... I've had 10 editors in my career, beginning with intimidating, 500-pound Eddie Booth at the Chico (Calif.) Enterprise-Record, who greeted my early work with: "This is crap. Can't you write any better than this?" I think he liked me ... The last three editors – all with the SR – fattened my resume. Chis Peck allowed me to write Huckleberries and, later, to write editorials for 13 years. As a newsroom dinosaur, I became the regions only full-time newspaper blogger in February 2004. Under Rob Curley, I realized a lifelong dream in January of writing multiple (four or five) columns per week. It almost killed me.

D.F.'s top five

I have enjoyed a newspaper career that started in 1970 with hot metal and linotype machines and now tries to survive while navigating cyberspace ... I would list my Huckleberries Online blog, which probably goes dark after today, as my crowning achievement of my career. Together with my commenters, blurkers (blog lurkers), and allied bloggers, we developed a cyber watering hole that modeled civility and proved that newspapers can operate blogs successfully ... Other top achievements would include: Promoting human rights in the region for three decades through reporting, columns and blog posts ... Helping stop the insane 2012 attempt in Coeur d'Alene to recall superb Mayor Sandi Bloem and council members Woody McEvers, Deanna Goodlander, and Mike Kennedy ... The Herb Caen Memorial Tidbits Award ... Survival. In the 21st century, I've watched dozens of friends and colleagues leave the newsroom as the result of buyouts,

layoffs, and career changes as newspapers all around died and the SR limped along ... Now, the bell tolls for me. I appreciate that Publisher Stacey Cowles is sending me out into the cold, cruel world of Donald Trump and Kim Jung Un with a nice buyout. He didn't have to do so.

Parting Shot

My dear wife, Brenda ("Mrs. O"), has put up with my daily deadlines and obsession with journalism for 42 years. Ditto for my Lord Jesus Who stepped into my life when I was 22 and covering a multiple-fatality church bus wreck in spring 1972. Neither has failed me. I have lived a blessed life of kings as a newspaperman. I hope that my work over these many years has blessed you, too.

--30-- (old journalism symbol for end of story)