

# Opinion

The Daily Olympian, Sunday

## Editor's Corner

### On The Making Of

By DEAN SHACKLETT

THERE ARE EASIER ways to turn a buck than working at newspapering. Sometimes the decisions that have to be made come hard. When this happens newspapers — and the communications media in general — often are blamed for the unpopular news they report.

Nothing new about this. The problem has been haunting us for years. Couple of weeks back I was in Chicago to attend a meeting of Gannett publishers and editors. While unpacking my suitcase I turned on television. The Sunday afternoon movie featured the late Edward G. Robinson portraying the lead role in a biography of Paul Reuter, founder of the worldwide British news agency that still bears his name.

As I was hanging up my suit, the last scenes unfolded on the television screen. Reuter walked through a hostile crowd into the halls of Parliament where he was under attack for distributing the news of Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

Reuter's first report, carried by no other news agency, caused a run on the British stockmarket that wiped out several fortunes. Few believed the Reuter news and many in government were demanding penalties be assessed against him and controls be enforced on the press in general.

At the peak of the debate official word came from the United States' ambassador that Lincoln was dead. Freedom of the press was praised as Reuter beamed and all was right in the celluloid world as the MGM lion began his closing growl and I switched off the TV.

THEN LAST WEEK THE PROBLEM came to roost much closer to home. With the discovery of a mutilated body of a girl in Margaret McKenny State Park, we suddenly had a vicious murder on our hands. Physical clues were all but non-existent.

In an effort to identify the victim and help learn the identity of her killer, The Olympian first printed pictures of her distinctive clothing. No response came from the public. Next an artist's sketch of the girl's face was printed. Still no response.

A picture of the dead girl's face, taken for the sheriff's office, was available. Investigators at this point had exhausted all leads. It was felt that wide circulation of the picture could lead to an identification.

I weighed the possible affront to our readers' sensibilities against the possibility of identifying the victim and learning who murdered her. I chose to print the picture.

AS EXPECTED most readers were shocked by the display. This all of us can understand. The picture — as it reflected this horrible crime, this inexcusable violation of a young life — shocked and disturbed me as few things have in this business. What I don't understand is those who seem to think such a picture was printed to financially benefit The Olympian or satisfy some perverse quirk of its editor.

We received about ten telephone calls and two letters along this line and I was visited by a delegation of four men who personally came in to register their displeasure. They opened their remarks by condemning me for this "distasteful effort to shock your readers and sensationalize the news to

674  
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# on Page

Sunday, December 15, 1973

## Of Hard Decisions

scribing both at their place of business and at home and some buying a newspaper off a downtown stand, as well as subscribing for home delivery.

But the critics I understand least are those who seem to reflect a need to be given the unpleasant news of the day in a sugar-coated, easily digested, acid-free pill. Unfortunately, life isn't like that. For a newspaper to suggest that it is would be a real disservice to readers.

WHICH BRINGS ME to my second, and equally important, reason for printing this disturbing picture of the murder victim. If such a picture will cause one young person — male or female — to give a second thought to climbing into a car with — or opening a door to — a stranger it will have served a most important purpose.

One of my visitors complained the picture caused his young son to wake up in the middle of the night with a bad dream. Better that he wake up in his own bed where he can be comforted by parents than perhaps make a mistake such as the one that led to our murder victim's death and suddenly come face to face with cold hard realism miles from any possible help.

Unfortunately, this is not the best of all possible worlds populated only by those as understanding and forgiving as parents and the boy next door. There are such things as bad boys and they often grow up to be bad men, commit bad deeds, are caught and turned loose to do it again. Sorry about that, but it's true.

THE MCKENNY PARK murder victim was identified the day after we printed the disturbing picture on page one. While the picture did not lead to the identification, at the time I made my decision to run it, it was the only unexploited lead remaining.

I think all of our sensibilities have been shocked by this terrible crime and the fact we now must add the name of Katherine Merry Devine, 14, to the listing of the unsolved murder of Pat Garrison, 17, and the missing, and feared dead, Debbie Potter, 19. I think many of us are disturbed by the fact our community has changed to the extent that such things are happening here.

For my part, I will continue to make the hard decisions that are a part of my job. Some of you will not always agree with what I decide but I hope you will accept the fact that I base them on what I think is best for the majority of our readers — which is another way of saying the community at large.

677