

Reader beware and consider the source

The American press has a long history of independence, a tradition which began in a rough-and-tumble world where every town might have half a dozen newspapers, each with its own (or its owners') point of view, but culminated in the established, supposedly unbiased era we live in today.

Newspapers pride themselves on their independence and their supposedly unbiased look at the world around them. And while we all know the system is hardly perfect, that there's no such thing as a total lack of bias, it does work pretty well most of the time.

In its heyday, the business was not unlike today's Internet. Any fool with a press and some type could start a newspaper, and more than a few did. As it became more of a business, however, it became both harder to start a newspaper – bigger, faster presses were a lot more expensive than the hand press of the 1830s – but harder to keep one going.

The industry consolidated and grew to the point where newspapers dominated the political and public conversation, but at the same time there were fewer and fewer print voices. Editors responded by firmly establishing the independence of the newsroom, insulating it from the supposedly corrupting influence of advertisers and politicians.

When there was only one paper in most towns, after all, the responsibility was great to ensure that everyone was treated fairly and that all voices were heard. And that has worked out pretty well, too.

All of which makes it hard to explain the rise of something called the KHI News Service, a supposedly independent operation run by the Kansas Health Institute. The Institute itself is a little bit of a mystery, a "think tank" and advocacy organization established by the Kansas Health Foundation. And if you're getting a little tired of wading through the layers, take a breath and hang on.

The foundation itself was created by the United Methodist Church with money from the sale of Wichita's Wesley Medical Center to a private operator nearly 30 years ago. The church put a \$200 million endowment into the foundation, originally known as the Wesley Medical Endowment.

So the Wichita-based foundation begat the institute, housed in Topeka, near policy makers and the Legislature. And the institute formed the news service, which lately has been pushing its "independent" status from its parent. At the same time, the foundation has branched out into offering commentary on health issues.

Some respected newspapers have accepted stories from the news service, which hired several veteran Statehouse reporters at a time when newspapers were cutting back on Topeka coverage. More recently, some have questioned the service's independence, especially in light of the commentary, or editorial, operation at the institute.

Certainly, the service is not an independent news source in the same way as the Associated Press, a co-operative formed by newspapers to cover national and international news (which now serves broadcast stations and websites as well). It's safe to say no one tells AP how to cover the news, though the owner-members certainly set the budget and priorities.

And we'd have to assume the foundation does that for its offspring, the news service.

So how's a reader to evaluate a news story from the institute? (These do not appear in our papers, by the way.) With care, we'd say, because the organization does have a viewpoint. It's up to each reader to evaluate the material.

The best advice is the old line, "consider the source," and this source has a bias toward public-health goals set by an activist few. Good or bad, these things are subject to debate.

A good example is a recent study by the institute trumpeted in Kansas newspapers that supposedly shows that the state's ban on indoor smoking has not hurt restaurant or bar trade. An independent review by one Kansas newspaper showed that the study's contention that sales have held up fails to consider inflation over the same years.

We'd say it's a case of "let the reader beware." – Steve Haynes

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



The joy of birth and the new baby

He's here! Little Lucian, our second great-grandchild is here, arriving last Monday about noon, just as scheduled. The best thing about having a planned Cesarean is, you can make out the birth announcements ahead of time. Hardly a baby is born nowadays without knowing its gender and already being named. The only unknowns are weight and length.

I don't know, do parents even send out birth announcements these days? Probably e-announcements. We received text pictures and messages the day he was born, I guess that counts as an announcement.

It's been a week now, and his big brother Kayden, almost three, may have decided he would have rather had a puppy.

-ob-

All this talk of babies makes me remember the birth of both my girls. Halley, the oldest, was born in a military hospital. It was during the Vietnam War and her father was stationed at Fort Gordon, Ga. Going for pre-natal check-ups was like reporting for a cattle call. The military looked upon dependents as a hindrance. The old saying was, "If the Army would have wanted you to have a family, they would have issued you one."

On any given day of the week hundreds of pregnant women would

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



line up at the OB/GYN building for their appointments; line up to weigh; line up to leave their little gift in the brown paper bag at the lab; line up to see the "doctor du jour"; and then line up to leave. The Army would have preferred we line up to have our babies, too.

Ah, yes. Then there was the delivery. Once they finally accepted the fact that you really did know that you were in labor, and that birth was imminent, you would be admitted. Fathers, however, were considered a nuisance and were not allowed anywhere near the labor room.

After Halley was born I was assigned a bed in a ward with dozens of other new mothers. There, we really did have to line up to wash our hands with disinfectant; line up to check our babies out of the nursery for feeding; and line up to check them back in.

Kara was born in a civilian hospital in Overland Park and unlike the military hospital where it was you, the doctor and a nurse, she arrived to quite

an audience. There were at least four nurses, some guy monitoring blood pressure, and since my doctor was late getting there, a doctor I had never seen before. My doctor, with a resident doctor in tow, made it for the grand finale. He said, "I knew you would be a good patient, so I brought him (the resident) along to observe." Guess I should have sold tickets.

Anyway, it all happened so fast, my husband was still signing my admission papers when Kara arrived. In short order we were in a room, he still in his suit and tie from work and me with hair and make-up looking like we just stepped out of the bandbox.

My roommate was a woman who had just spent about four days in hard labor and looked like she had been pulled through a knothole backwards. Her husband was by her side, looking worse than she did; unshaven, hollow-eyed and rumpled. They asked, "When did you have your baby?"

My husband looked at his watch and said, "About 15 minutes ago."

They both groaned and said, "It's not fair."

The rest of their story is, the husband was a veterinarian. During the extended labor he asked the attending doctor, "Doc, can't we just pull it" Ah, the sensitivity.

Celebrating fifty years of milestones together

This is the year in which Bob and I will celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. We had originally planned to take a cruise sometime during the summer and call that good, but our children had other ideas. First they pulled off getting fabulous family photographs taken because I love family pictures.

Then our daughter Allison asked if we would have an event to celebrate. We originally said no, but then agreed to have a small Open House. At that point, Allison and her sister-in-law began making plans. It will be more than we had envisioned, but I believe it will be a beautiful occasion.

All of these plans made me think about 50th wedding anniversaries and couples who reach this milestone. There aren't many. The first couple I thought of was my grandparents. I found photos from their anniversary several years ago when I did Heritage albums for our children and for us. My grandparents were very special to me, and I realize how important their

Life is
Good
Rita
Speer



marital longevity was to me.

Another couple I considered are long-time friends. Bob went to school with both of them, and she and I were classmates in nursing school. She introduced Bob and me shortly before our graduation. They celebrated their 50th last year by going to Las Vegas with their family for a weekend. Both are retired and enjoying life. They are the only people whom we have known throughout their marriage who have reached this important milestone.

There are several other couples we know who have achieved 50 or more years of marriage. Some seem to still be in love with their mates. Others have shared with us that they have

been married 50 or more years, but most of these couples are more recent acquaintances. With many of them, I experience a sense of being totally comfortable with their mate; there is no need to try to change the other. There is acceptance of the other. Sadly there are couples we know who seem simply to be putting up with their spouses; I wonder what happened to the qualities that originally drew them together.

I feel so blessed that we are among the couples who are still in love, able to surprise and be surprised by the other and who can say honestly, "I am married to my best friend." Like any couple we've had ups and downs, times when we struggled and times when it felt like we could coast. We have even faced life-threatening illnesses, but we faced all the challenges together. And we never considered any other option than growing old together. God has blessed us richly in many ways, and this anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate one of his blessings.

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