

Evidently, writing columns is harder for some than others

When I notice the dearth of local Opinion Page columns by Reed Eckhardt since McCracken left him to fend for himself, I am reminded of a friend of mine who writes a column for a weekly newspaper in northern Wisconsin.

It is a rarity now to read words with a local flavor in the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle. The publisher has never contributed to the printed word, preferring to do what he understands best - have lunch with others like him in town who have nothing to do in their business (bankers) or time on their hands for networking at endless lunches (attorneys). Since the City created a "make work" job for Scott Smith last fall, Eckhardt is pretty much left alone to write any words that will appear on those two pages in the center of some section of the reformatted paper.

A typical Cheyenne Herald has between 10,000 and 12,000 words of original and local content. Granted, it is only published every other week but it is also likely that there are more words, averaged daily, on these pages than on the WT-E's.

Someone besides Reed picks up all the wire service fodder and syndicated offerings used in the WT-E to build those two pages. But, with almost everything presented being "cut and paste," you'd think Reed (or Mike McCracken, for that matter) would want more original and local words in that paper. Do more themselves.

In a review of the WT-E papers printed for a recent ten day period, it was found that there were eight "In Our Opinion" columns and no Reed Eckhardt columns. The former "Our View" offerings are stretched to look like more words by eating up about a third of the vertical height with headlines and multiple subheads, not content.

On two of the days, editorials from the St. Louis Post Dispatch and the Philadelphia Inquirer were used. *The National Enquirer would make more sense.*

An "In Our Opinion" column is 450-475 words in length - not counting the wasted space for heads and subheads. Much of the area of the redesigned WT-E is used for pictures, cartoons and 72-point heads. There is so little local news that the now dark Channel 5 provides more in the way of local news. Local sports is fine - more so if you have children or your friends have children on teams in town.

My friend in Wisconsin writes a weekly column and accumulates news about what is going on in the community in which she lives - which is the largest city (town) in the newspaper's coverage area.

She occasionally mentions one of my forebears. I read her column - about 1,000 words in each column - weekly to see if I know anybody of whom she writes and what they're up to. She puts far more work and effort into her weekly column, with only slightly fewer words on a weekly average, than does Reed Eckhardt. And she doesn't resort to "guest" editorials. When I visited with her last fall, she indicated that it's getting harder and harder to put out her column on a weekly schedule. She has asked in her column if anyone locally would care to share it with her - each doing a biweekly column. So far there have been no takers. She'd be a hard act to follow. She just keeps gathering the news and hammering out her column. Many in the area and distant subscribers like me rely on her. She doesn't let us down. She's a trooper.

Oh, did I mention that she's 92 years young? A remarkable and dedicated lady.

Bristol Palin

She has no cred as spokesperson for abstinence

It's about that time. Time for the Ootomom to become spokeswoman in opposition to in-vitro fertilization.

Or for O.J., from a cell somewhere, to release a statement that he thinks domestic abusers should be shot - even in Cheyenne, Wyoming - without being given "passes" for their first two offenses.

When did this all begin? When did it matter what offenders later had to say against their offense or actions?

Vanessa Williams should any day now come to the defense of the embattled Miss California. The "racy" photos being circulated on the internet of Carrie Prejean reveal less than bikinis do on the beach (or at the Miss USA pageant) or many outfits do on fashion runways.

The most unfortunate of all the "spokespersons" employed now by one cause or another is young Bristol Palin.

Her introduction to the public eye - not in Wasilla, Alaska where everyone knew who she was, that she was pregnant and who the father was - was at the Republican National Convention. Bristol and her "boyfriend" were paraded before the cameras with the rest of Sarah Palin's nuclear family. With Bristol's out-of-wedlock pregnancy at 18 years of age and Sarah's little fellow so affectionately cared for by everyone from his next older sister, Piper, to his mom, along with Alaska's "First Dude," the potential Second Family had it all. Beauty and the blemishes. A real American family. A story just beginning.

The boyfriend by Bristol's side was probably just on a scouting trip. A mission to see if he could find any other teenager girls smitten by his "hockey player" rugged good looks and his lack of responsibility. The McCain ticket was damned if they did and damned if they didn't. The contradiction was not lost on the Democrats. The mom who said all the right conservative things having a daughter at her side who didn't practice all of them.

Sarah kept the lightweight reporters and photographers at bay during the convention and afterward. Bristol was not questioned - none of the children or grandchildren of any candidate were - so her full "story" was not heard. Imagine what might have come out if Joe Biden's daughter had been asked her feelings about illegal drugs. And her use of them.

At one point after that introduction to the voyeuristic media and public of the "lower 48," Bristol Palin did say that abstinence was "not realistic." Who better to know?

Within months of that spotlight blinding her personal life - again because of the contradiction of her mother's political positions and her (Bristol's) circumstances, her ne'er-do-well boyfriend was either thrown over the side or he jumped. If he were pushed, he probably was leaning. He had not been looking for a wife and baby. He was looking for another conquest and who better than the Governor of Alaska's daughter? He had no way of knowing at the time they were doing what they did that his conquest's mother would soon be on national TV.

Not that he minded. But he could have played it differently had he known their lives would change so dramatically so quickly. Hell, he could have practiced "safe sex" all the time, not just "most of the time," as he told Larry King.

What the American short-attention-span public learned from the boy and his family just whetted appetites for more. Soon, Levi Johnston will be long gone from the public eye but still successful with teenage girls in Alaska. He will no longer be invited to Larry King or other shows that fed his ego. Unless, of course, Sarah Palin is a candidate for the Republican nomination for President ahead of 2012.

Bristol Palin was, apparently, a quite willing partner in their behavior. Why? Was it because she envied the attention given her mother and wanted more for herself? Was it because she felt the love she had earlier in her years had been transferred to her younger sisters and now the little guy who will need care and attention beyond any the other children needed? Did she feel taken for granted as her older brother joined the Army and was going to Iraq? Superfluous? When Willow and Piper traveled with mom to events around Alaska, was the 17 year-old left behind?

Bristol said it best. She said it before she became a pawn for a cause. That cause is abstinence. In a perfect world, slogans like "Just Say No!" and a reasonably attractive teenager who just had a baby telling her peers that abstinence is the only answer, would be wonderful.

Parents need to speak with their children about realities, not slogans. And it is the parent's responsibility, not Nancy Reagan or Bristol Palin, to discuss real-life situations with their children. Bristol Palin is simply not credible speaking about abstinence. And her life has not been damaged. It has been changed. She is a privileged child whose life will continue privileged. She is not alone and she is not without. She should return to Wasilla and do the best job she can raising Tripp.

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