

# Steamboat Reporter

## A Story of Dee Richards



By John DeYoung

Obviously, a man's judgement cannot be better than the information on which he has based it. Give him the truth and he may still go wrong when he has the chance to be right, but give him no news or present him only with distorted and incomplete data, with ignorant, sloppy or biased reporting, with propaganda and deliberate falsehoods, and you destroy his whole reasoning processes, and make him something less than a man.

Arthur Hays Sulzberger 1948  
Address, New York State Publisher's  
Association

Ever since I was 9 or 10, when I had the pleasure of having an English teacher who inspired me to poetry and short stories, I have been interested in writing. To become a creator of words and thoughts has never stopped intriguing me, so to further investigate into this field, I talked to Dee Richards, managing editor and reporter for the *Steamboat Pilot*.

### The Pilot Founded

"James Hoyle was an old-time printer in Eastern Colorado. Early in 1885 he heard that a town company was being formed which would establish a new community across the range on the west slope of the Rocky Mountains. Eager to start in business for himself, Hoyle talked to

James Crawford, the first settler in Steamboat Springs. Crawford encouraged the printer to move to Steamboat Springs and start a newspaper there. The town company donated a town lot for the newspaper office.

"The printer found a second-hand press in Boulder. It was run by foot power and produced one page with five columns. Actually the press had quite a history. It had come by ox team across the plains from St. Joseph, Missouri, taking three months to make the trip. For quite a time it was used to print a newspaper for Central City.

"The Hoyles, and Mrs. Hoyle was very much a part of her husband's business, left Boulder in mid-summer of 1885. With three teams pulling the family possessions and the heavy press, they came through Egeria Park and followed the river bottom to Steamboat Springs. Coming into town, they found only dirt tracks and sagebrush and very few buildings. There were five cabins near the river and one very small store. Because there was no building on the lot, the Hoyles borrowed a little log house on Yampa Street.

"You might be interested to learn that the July 31, 1885 issue of the Steamboat Pilot was the first newspaper printed in Northwest Colorado. One week later the Meeker Herald had its first publication. The first paper was just one large sheet, folded in the middle. It had no local news at all but just stories and bits of news from the East."

Wanting to find out the history of the Pilot, I asked Dee to tell me about Mr. Hoyle, the first editor and owner of the Pilot. "The Hoyles were very industrious. Mrs. Hoyle worked side-by-side with her husband in setting type. The Pilot found more permanent quarters in the fall of 1885 when a sawed log building was built on Lincoln Avenue. The printing office was located in the front of the building with living quarters for the

Hoyles at the back and in the loft. Hoyle was a very political sort and mixed into some fairly bitter campaigns. Perhaps because of this, a rival paper began to be printed in 1888. It was called the Inter Mountain.

#### **Charlie Leckenby Takes The Reins**

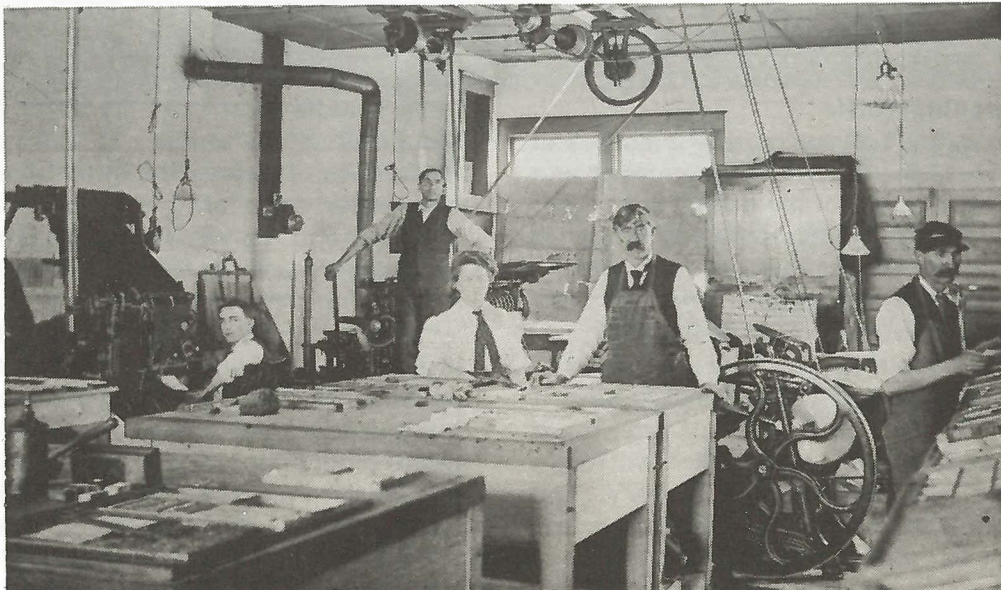
" 'Young Charlie' Leckenby was hired by Hoyle in 1889 to set type, run the press and other duties which ran from sweeping, to delivering the paper, to pumping water. When he was only 17, he was suddenly left with the Inter Mountain, the previous owners having departed for points East. The history is complicated in a simple sort of way. A John Weiskopf was a homesteader in Pleasant Valley. During the winters he worked as a printer in Boulder. On Hoyle's death in 1894, Weiskopf took charge of the Pilot. One year later, 'Charlie' went into partnership on the Pilot lease. In the spring of 1896 he bought the Yampa Valley Democrat and later consolidated it with the Pilot.

"A devastating fire in the spring of 1909 destroyed the Pilot building and everything in it. Lost was the fine old press, all the records, subscription lists and type. In November of that year a large new brick building was constructed on the site. That same brick building is here today and holds the print shop, the advertising department, the business office and some of the reporting staff's offices.

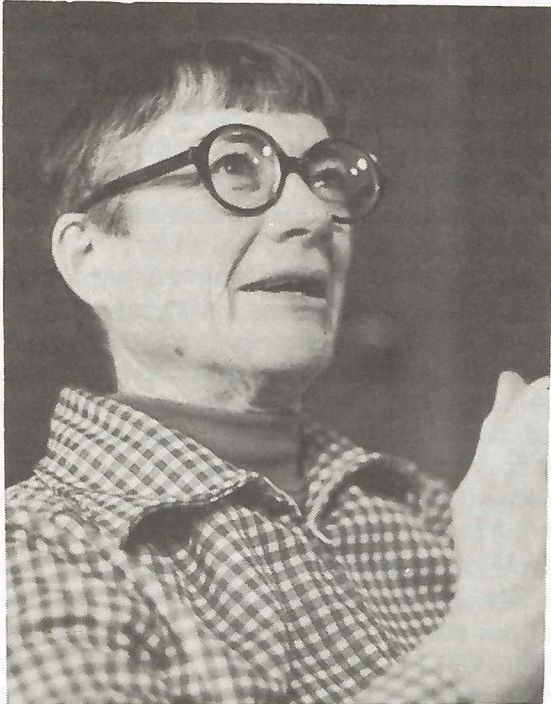
"In this newspaper, we work differently from other newspapers. Most newspapers' reporters do not put their stories together in what we call paste-up, but at the Pilot we do that. Reporters are responsible for the paste-up of all the stories in the newspaper."

#### **The Pressures of a Reporter**

"If you are writing a controversial story the pressures are different. People want to read what you are going to write and many times people will say, 'I want to read what you have



written before it goes in the newspaper.' My response usually is, 'You may read it if you like if we have time to show it to you. However, we reserve the right to write our own newspaper stories; we are not writing press releases.' If all they want is a goody-two-shoes article, they will have to pay for one and put it in an ad. We do have to be a little careful because our newspaper is supported by advertisements. If we insult all of our advertisers we are going to be in bad trouble. So we have to be a little bit careful and be sure that we have everything verified.



**“A reporting job is not one which wins popularity contests ... but, hopefully, respect.”**

#### **Dee - The Managing Editor**

“Most managing editors do the hiring and firing, take care of the flow of the newspaper and operate the financial end of the paper, but I don't do all that. We have just changed many things on this newspaper; we are just beginning to make a new system work. A newspaper is by the very nature of its operation in crisis at all times.

“You have to have the news, you have to have it when it is being made and you have to have it ready to go. You don't have a lot of time to sit down and contemplate about the world in general before you start writing a story. The news is a last-minute thing. You aren't reporting last week's news unless it is just something of

general interest, so the reporter must get the writing done. Okay now, the news business has to flow smoothly. Unfortunately it doesn't always. The job of the newspaper editor is to make all of the steps work together to come out with a newspaper.

“When I first started, the men working the linotype machines put the news together. They put the linotype in galleys and figured out how all of the pages were going to look. Even our photographs were done differently. We used to put them on what we called an engraving machine which engraved the pictures on pieces of plastic. I would paste the plastic onto very hard wood which was the same depth as the lines of type. We do the pictures differently now. Oh yes, I forgot to say that reporting is about the lowest paying of all professional jobs. If you are going into reporting for the pay, that's just not where you should be. Further, I have always followed a personal policy. I take very few extras, or freebies as you might call them, for instance, ski passes, trips, favors, that kind of thing, because I want to be totally free. That doesn't mean that if I'm invited to a luncheon, you can't accept the lunch, because it would be silly not to. But people who begin to offer little extra goodies -- I am very much opposed to that.

#### **The Pilot Picks Up Steam**

“Believe it or not, for nineteen months during 1910-1911 the **Pilot** was a daily paper. It grew from a four to an eight-page newspaper as the years passed. When I came to work for the newspaper about 14 years ago, the **Pilot** had twelve pages. As a comparison, today our newspaper has between 44 and 48 pages. Of course, the size is just one of the many changes which have happened during the years I've worked for the **Pilot**.

“In the mid-1960s, the building had essentially three rooms. The front room on the east side contained the business office, my desk, a desk for Chuck Leckenby and assorted office supplies for sale. We all did a variety of jobs and certainly helped each other when there was time. The large middle room held the great flatbed press. Fred Muth stood at one end of the press and fed the sheets of newsprint into the machine. The newspaper came out cut, printed, and folded at the other end. Three of us would then address the newspapers and get them over to the post office for mailing. The third room was the print shop.

“Perhaps you might be interested in the history of newspaper printing... at least as it occurred at the **Pilot**. The early system was the hand-set process. Heavy metal trays called galleys held the news stories. Skilled printers, working from little boxes filled with tiny metal letters, would form words and sentences and stories with these pieces. The stories were

placed on the galleys which in turn were fitted into the press. After the printing was completed, each little letter had to be cleaned and returned to its proper box, to be used for the next newspaper. It was tedious, slow and highly skilled work.

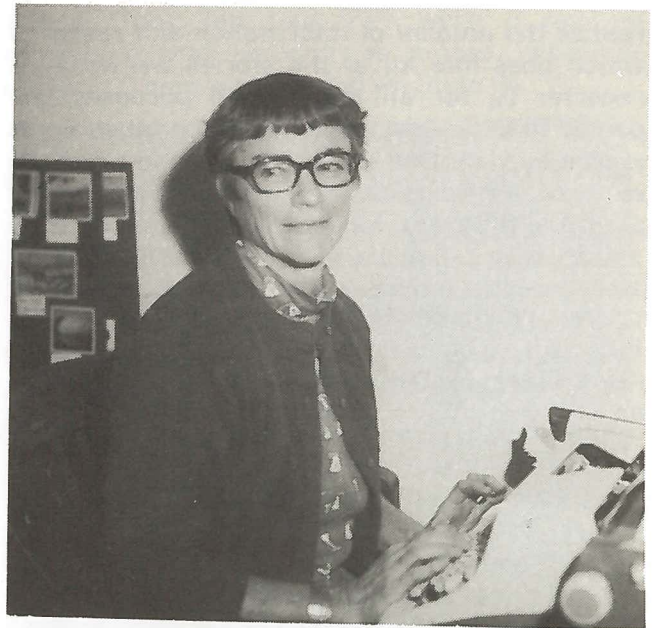
"A great improvement was the hot-type, linotype machines. At one time we had three in our print shop. The linotype operator would type on a keyboard at the front of the machine. Metal lines of type would be produced and these would then be placed in the galleys. The galleys were locked into heavy metal frames which were placed in the flatbed press. This method was certainly far faster and eliminated the tedious job of returning each letter to its little box. The used type was placed in a heater which melted it to be used again. Today we work with computers, we have machines which turn out copy just as you see it today in the newspaper. I've seen some machines of tomorrow at press conventions and know that what we use today will be as crude in the future as the early typesetting seems to us now.

"The day I walked into the *Pilot* to begin my first day of work, I had never had more to do with a newspaper than read its news. Chuck, the grandson of the earlier 'Charlie,' pointed me to a big rolltop desk next to his against the east wall of the front room. 'That's yours!' he explained, and that seemed to be that. I was the entire reporting staff. I was also the whole photography crew. Whatever news was in the *Pilot* back then was there because I wrote it. My beat included not only the news of the town, but all the school events, and also the news from around the county.

"I traveled to either South or West Routt once each week. I guess I don't have to tell you that we didn't cover the news quite as well then. Of course, there wasn't as much going on either. Those first few months at the *Pilot* were nervous months for me. I knew about everyone in Steamboat Springs, but little about the newspaper business. My previous writing had been confined to letters to my family and friends. **So Many Changes...**

"So many changes have taken place recently that it's almost hard to recall just how it was then. There was not a Mt. Werner. Skiing was confined to Howelsen Hill. Winters were very quiet. We all worked hard on the Winter Carnival...everyone in town was involved. Except for that weekend, the motels were closed until early summer. You could stand in the middle of our main street and carry on a long conversation with a friend. There was no danger because there was no traffic!

"My first year at the *Pilot* was fun, but also frustrating. I was certainly no photographer. I



## The Early Days.

was given a large graflex camera with a Polaroid backing. It was heavy to carry around and required a large box of film. Shortly after I started work, the fire whistle blew. It was very cold and the water from the fire hose had created a large ice lake around the building. Of course, I dashed up to get my 'exclusive' and fell on my face. Pieces of that camera slid across the ice in all directions. Believe me, it took a lot of courage to return to the office and show Chuck my pockets full of camera pieces. I think I used about \$600 worth of film before I began to understand how the camera worked. I'll have to say that Chuck was the master of patience.

"Newspaper work is exciting and challenging and not always easy. You are, for sure, where the action is. A reporter must know the community, and it helps to like the people in it. I have an advantage because I've lived here long enough to have a real feeling for the area and a clear understanding of the way it works. To be a reporter for a weekly newspaper takes a certain kind of person. Even after all these years, I can't imagine having any other kind of job which would bring me the satisfaction this one has. I'm able to set goals and see them fulfilled, and after completing the day-to-day work, there is still time to take on special assignments. These have, of course, been of my own choosing. What other job would give the freedom to search for wildlife by helicopter, ride in a hot air balloon, tour an underground mine? I've spent many days with the wildlife officers and members of the Routt National Forest, exploring problems and programs in this county.

"The variety of subjects is almost unlimited for a reporter who wants to explore new areas of living in this part of Colorado. Most people don't

realize the amount of information and research which goes into all of the stories we write. A reporter is, for all intents and purposes, expected to be an instant authority on all subjects known to man. One day might include a feature story on a new regional wastewater treatment plant, a program for physically handicapped children, and the life of moose in North Park. Especially in the weekly newspaper, a reporter covers the whole spectrum of life. Our beat can include sports, politics, club activities, church news, law enforcement, health, and the list goes on and on.

"One night I rode in a police patrol car for about six hours. The story then told what it was to be a law officer on the night beat. I've gone out before dawn to watch the mating dance of the sharp-tailed grouse. And all reporters have been called to fires and accidents long after they have gone to bed. That's just part of the job. Because I wanted to experience firsthand being locked up in our county jail, several years ago I arranged to have myself arrested for hitchhiking on a Friday afternoon. The jail was, at this time, notorious for its lack of facilities and had been cited by the State Health Department for non-compliance with health standards. Of course, I needed to have someone know that I was in jail and free me first thing on Monday morning, so the judge and the assistant district attorney were told of my plans.

"As with the best laid plans of mice and men, this didn't work out quite as expected. I had spent the previous week worrying about the long weekend and what in the world I would do with my time in the small cell. Because of a two-car accident, the law officer who was to arrest me didn't have time. I waited and waited at the



rendezvous site and finally went home... tired and cold. He called, explaining about the accident, and then said that our plan wouldn't have worked anyway. The sheriff had been told of our



**"A telephone book is as close as your typewriter."**

'plot' and had closed the jail. All the prisoners were transferred to Craig. Because the city police use the county jail, they had to take their prisoners to Craig, too. The chief threatened to sue the sheriff because he was having to use his men to transport prisoners.

"I'm not totally blaming the sheriff for the bad jail conditions because he was limited in what he could do by his budget. But the jail isn't a very inspiring place. At that time the beds in the single cells were broken and the toilets stopped up. After what occurred, however, I was both disappointed and relieved. I'm not really trying to point up poor jail conditions, but merely using this example to show that a reporter can find a story idea and act on it. In this, the job offers a lot of independence. Reporters at the Pilot, for instance, are encouraged to take a special assignment and follow through with a series.

#### **The Pilot Today...**

"Our sports reporter covers all of the sports in Steamboat Springs. In addition, he is responsible for the school news. Another reporter covers the county, including news from Hayden, Oak Creek, Yampa and Phippsburg. He will, this summer, be writing stories on energy production. Christine McKelvie and I cover the city and

county government, planning commissions, law enforcement, health agencies and a number of other assignments. Our excellent photographer takes most of the pictures and also does some feature writing.



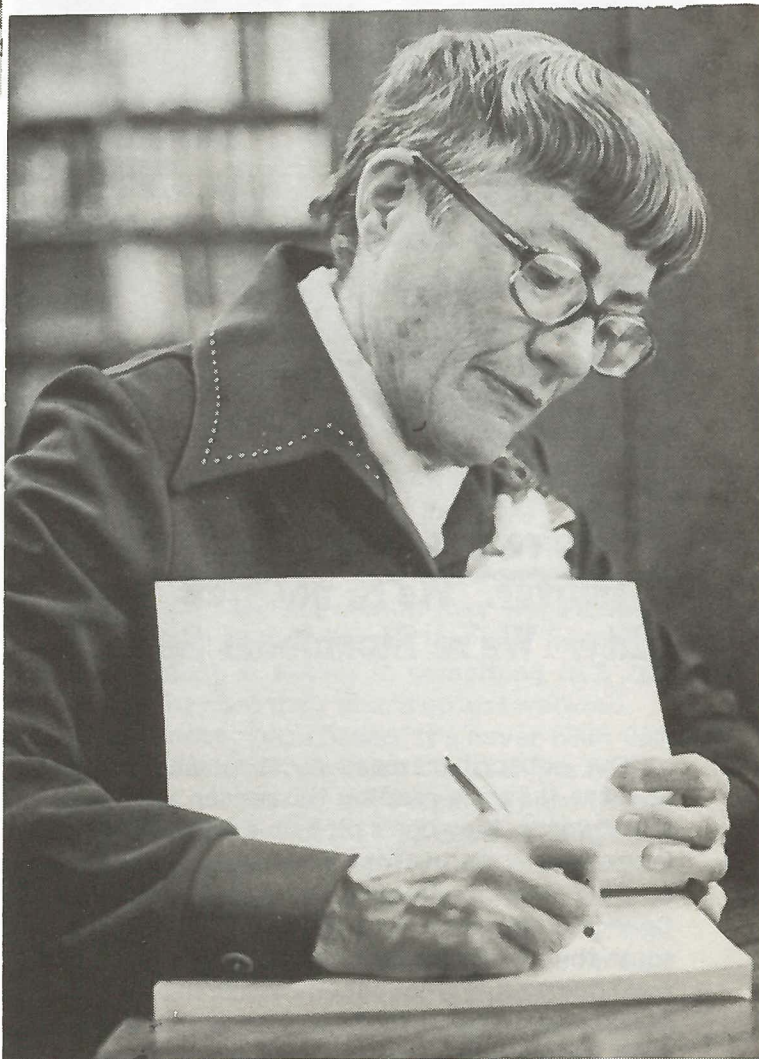
### **The Ups and Downs of Reporting**

"You have to be willing to give up a lot of your personal life if you want to do a good job as reporter. Your time is really never your own because there are so many meetings and special events which occur at night or on weekends. I set my own pattern and realize that the demands of the job are not the regular eight-to-five kind. It isn't unusual to be called about six in the evening and be asked to cover a dinner which starts at 6:30 that same night. Even going just to get a photograph requires dressing for a party and breaking into the evening.

"A reporter covers hundreds of meetings, many of which are not exactly stimulating events. Our writing time is broken into dozens of times each day with phone calls and people who drop in just to chat. But that's part of the job. You had better like and be interested in people because in this job it's essential. The most difficult assignment, I guess, is the investigative story. It might damage someone's reputation or expose some bad business practices or tell of corruption in local government. People don't want to be quoted even though they seem very willing to give you a story. Even though you feel the story should be written, there are times when you are going to make some people angry. That, again, goes with the job.

"During the years I wrote 'Along the Bounding Main' I received both happy and angry comments. It was a highly editorialized column and expressed my views on a number of local issues. Interestingly enough, anger is usually short-lived. I believe a newspaper's duty is to make its readers aware of abuses as well as the happy things which are happening. The newspaper serves its community by holding public officials accountable for their actions.

"Most people are very good about helping reporters research stories. To illustrate, several years ago I wrote a series on coal development in the county. I visited the major mines and was treated with great courtesy. At the Edna Mine, the superintendent personally drove me to the huge dragline. The machine was stopped so we could get on, and we then went up to the cab to take pictures from there. A blast was set off especially for photographs. I'm sure I could have gone up the catwalk to the top of the boom, but I just couldn't get up the courage. Actually there is a good exchange between the newspaper and the community. We act as an informing agency and both private and public agencies know it is to their benefit to cooperate.



"I don't feel that I've written all that many controversial articles. To be sure, I've had people come up to me and shout, 'You're all wrong. You're way off. Who the heck do you think you are, anyway?' But for the same article, someone else will comment that 'Boy, that's the way. Hit them hard,' and 'they should be told.'" **Treacherous Moments..**

"Every reporter tries to be absolutely fair. Even then, there is no way to avoid getting some people upset. A reporter must be sure of sources and double check facts. And finally, a good reporter has to be independent. A reporting job is not one which wins popularity awards, but, hopefully, respect. Feature writing is usually different in that most times it points to the positive. It is just as important to give readers the good side of the community... the positive work which is going on... the neat people who are our neighbors... as to continually tear down the community and point up only its bad features.



**"We're not Aspen. We're not Denver. We're not New York City. We're Steamboat Springs."**

"Our subscribers read news stories, but not because they are reading the person writing. In other words, they don't pick up a paper and read it because Christine McKelvie is writing a story on City Council, they pick it up to read on City Council. I do have a very definite personality and some things I feel very strongly about. Integrity and honesty are among them. When I see that not happening it really bothers me and I show it. With my background of many years in Steam-

boat, there are some things I can evaluate from a totally different viewpoint.

"My attitudes have changed since I first started reporting. Newspaper people are usually looked on as rude, overbearing and brash. Reporters sometimes have to be that way if they are going to get a story. I had to overcome my own reluctance. A reporter, for instance, interrupts somebody who is talking in order to find out some information or the correct spelling of a word when a person might be taking off in ten minutes to go to the airport. Those are some things that you just have to learn to do.

#### **News Creator?**

"Accurate reporting of the news, not making the news, is the most important activity associated with the reporter's job. A reporter can easily make news by creating situations where news will evolve. Sometimes that is good. Christine made the news by encouraging a housing forum which was held here last January. That's good. She went beyond her job in order to do that. One year, to give you another example, I started a series on issues of the day. One was the need for a runoff ramp for the west side of Rabbit Ears Pass because we were having so many accidents. I asked a group of people to come together to discuss the problem. I was making that news because I planned the meeting. We talked about the problem and from that evolved the runoff ramp. That was making the news, not reporting on it.

"Editorializing in news stories and projecting the reporter's own opinions are not good. We all do that inadvertently by a word or by the way we start our sentence or any number of ways. Very subtly we can convey to the people who are reading our newspaper what we feel is important about a meeting. To comment about a regular meeting in a straight news story, not an editorial page, is very poor policy because later somebody is going to look back at that newspaper. That person is not going to know about the meeting. He's going to know how the reporter felt about the meeting. Let's say you might use some adjectives to describe someone. You wouldn't call someone stupid, but you might say that he didn't comprehend what was going on. That would be your opinion. Newspaper writers have to be very careful to keep editorializing and editorials on the editorial page. A reporter who has a conflict of interest should not be covering a particular subject.

#### **Me, A Reporter?**

"First of all a reporter should have an innate liking for people and a liking to be where the excitement is. He should be very inquisitive and a little bit forward. A reporter must have a basic English grammar and spelling background.

People who don't have that should look for another field. If he doesn't know a period from a comma, reporting news is not where he should be. Grammar and spelling are tools — just as a carpenter needs a hammer. To write precisely and to say what you want to say in the words you want to use, you can't misspell or leave a few hanging participles and non-modifying phrases. You aren't getting across your ideas, okay people do not like to have their names misspelled, so a telephone book is as close as your typewriter. One thing is certain; the whole paper is read. A reporter may never hear that he has done a good job, but he will always hear about the mistakes he has made.

#### **Oops... Mistakes, Anyone?**

"Oh, yes. I remember one mistake specifically. I misspelled the name of a woman in her obituary. Her son would not only not speak to me, but he would even walk across the street to avoid me, for years.

"If we have made a mistake we will put in an apology. Unfortunately, it's after the fact because no one ever reads the apology; people read the mistake that you made. If it is a really bad one and you know it hurt somebody inadvertently, (no reporter ever does that consciously, no reporter goes out to make a mistake), you usually call the person and say that it is your fault and you are terribly sorry and that you had no intention of doing it, and that is about the best you can do.



**Many more awards have been put on this wall since "Charlie" Leckenby sat at this desk.**

"A reporter needs the ability to organize. That is quite important because otherwise he gets

bogged down. He has to be able to work under pressure. There is no substitute for on-the-job training. A journalism school background is good, but it's not the whole answer by any means. This may sound theatrical, but out in the real world there are many important tools. Knowing the community, knowing the people who are in it, is extremely important. You know, we're not Aspen, we're not Denver, we're not New York City. We're Steamboat Springs.!

#### **Thinking Ahead...**

"It depends on what a reporter is doing. Christine is doing a study on housing, and she is thinking about that. She is thinking about where she is going to go to get the information and she is beginning to call to get people's schedules so that she can go and visit them. After the research is completed she needs to put together the story. It takes a while to do that.

"You don't have time to sit down and make a thesis out of most news stories. You have to get the story organized in your head and go for it. You're not writing for a book so you think differently. There are certain organizing skills you need if you're going to make it, because you are under pressure all of the time, or at least most of the time. First you are assigned, or assign yourself, a story. It might be City Council meetings; it might be a feature story. Most features in the *Pilot* are planned by the person doing them. The first thing you do is outline in your mind where you are going with the subject

"There are many different ways to accomplish what you want to do. Let me give you an example. I decided to do a series on child abuse, for 1979. Because Routt County is small the paper cannot use names and real events. They are too familiar and someone might pick up on them from what is written. Because of this I decided the thrust of my articles would be on agencies and what services those agencies offer. My first visit was to the Social Services to get a general idea about child abuse. I needed some statistics. When I went to the Social Services I was given several names in Denver to call. The next step was to call to get the information needed. Then I took it back to the office and began to organize what I had.

"As I write, I first decide what my opening paragraph or even sentence is going to be. That's the most important thing in the story. How interesting that first sentence is will determine if people will want to read the rest. This week I started my child abuse story by talking about a woman who has been sentenced to twenty years in prison for the death of her child. That is an unusually severe punishment and hopefully will make people want to read the article. As a reporter you don't sit down and write out an outline by pen or on your typewriter. You don't



have time for that. You learn how to organize in your own mind and start your typing at that point. You may have to do a lot of crossing out and revising but most copy sort of flows because you have learned how to write that way.

"After the story is written you decide what pictures you need and you send a photographer out to take what you want. Your story then goes to the typesetter, and then to the proofreader who reads it for mistakes. It finally comes out proofed and ready to be put on the page.

#### **The Pilot Wins Again...**

"Yes, I have won awards. The first time I entered a newspaper contest the **Pilot** won a state award. Usually my series articles have won some kind of an award. This last year I did a study on water because of the drought situation. That won what they call a state sweepstakes award, as the best for a weekly newspaper in Colorado. We won a first place in the national contest for that same series. I went to San Diego in November 1978 to pick up the award; and served on a panel during that convention. I also won an award for a Centennial series which was

later published in book form. Last year's drought articles were special for me, which I saw as an interesting possibility. I like to do a series that gives me a motivation to do more than just the ordinary day-to-day thing. The subject started with the economic effect of the drought on Routt County and ended up to be a whole series on water laws and water districts.

"Doing a job that I think is done well is the most satisfying part of my work. Probably the most important part of the job is the learning process. It's like going to school; you are always learning something which broadens your own horizons. For instance, I went to Denver to the conference on weather modification. Every subject is different. The will to learn is very important. Curiosity is also a very important part of my job. Being in exciting situations affects a lot of the day-to-day drudgery. It continues to be hard for me to write but there isn't any place I would rather work. I like the job and I like the community. I can't think of any other job that would offer what this one does."

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## **LETTER FROM THE EDITOR**

It has been five years since the founding of **Three Wire Winter** magazine. Since then we have put out ten editions, all about Northwest Colorado's history. **Three Wire Winter** was started by a class of 25 students and two advisors. This year we have a bulging classroom of 31 members, which is extremely large for the use of only three cameras, four tape recorders, one light table and one small darkroom. Over the past five years, we, like any small or large business, have had our share of problems but all concerned struggled through and handled most obstacles.

This being my second year as a member of **Three Wire Winter** I reflect on my first impressions of the class. It's a slow and tedious process from being a new student in the fall to the final production of our magazine, months afterwards. Each person enrolled in the class must build a story from the ground up. The story starts with an interview of a person, the interviewer seeking either personal or general information. The topic or person is chosen from a composite class suggested list — a transcription of the interview is made and film developed. Prints are made from negatives and a rough draft is begun. Rolls of tape are used, and many decision-ridden hours are spent putting together a readable story. Proofreading occurs at this stage and a final typewritten draft is made. This copy is sent to the printer to be typeset and final pictures are made into PMTs for printing. The

printer sets the story into columns and returns it with pictures and headlines, so the final layout can be done. With this process finished three to four weeks later, 1500 copies are put at our back door ready to be sold to you, the reader.

Let me tell you, to be present in the **Three Wire Winter** room from 1:45-3:30, an outsider might judge our class as a three ring circus. Most of us would probably agree. The general feeling about the class is, "I think it's great, but crazy and unorganized." Many realize this and take advantage of the freedom, yet knowing much needs doing and time is a factor. Over-all I think students get more out of this class than any other offered in high school and because of the class interest and variety the **Three Wire Winter** staff often feels privileged. After all, we can see our work actually published.

I would like to ask your help in supporting our organization. Any assistance you might provide would be greatly appreciated. After all we've gone almost five years, why quit now?

Our address is:

Three Wire Winter  
P.O. Box 664  
Steamboat Spgs., Colo. 80477

Thank you,  
Curtis Laisle  
Three Wire Winter

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