

THE MIAMI HERALD AND THE MILLER EFFECT:
LITERARY JOURNALISM IN THE 1980S

By

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by

David Duwe Stanton

This document is dedicated to my wife, Autumn

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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The Miami Herald and the Miller Effect: Literary Journalism in the 1980s

examines the factors that led to the *Herald's* fast rise to status as one of the finest newspapers in the country.

Many journalists and academics have examined literary journalism, particularly the New Journalism of New York in the 1960s and 70s. Proponents of the New Journalism used literary elements to create a different voice for journalism and incorporate grit and context lacking from traditional, inverted-pyramid-style writing.

Gene Miller won the first two Pulitzer Prizes in the history of the *Herald* in 1967 and 1976, and his stature at the paper shielded him from low-level editors criticizing the journalistic style he used. As an editor and mentor, Miller fostered creativity to tell different stories in compelling ways.

This thesis also looks at Edna Buchanan, Miller's main protégé, and Carl Hiaasen, one of the most famous journalists to emerge from the *Herald* during this time. Buchanan and Hiaasen later transitioned from journalists to novelists, though Hiaasen continues to write columns for the *Herald*.

The *Herald* may not be the only paper to employ literary techniques in daily newspaper writing, but the newsroom and organizational culture helped the paper go from one Pulitzer in the 60s and one in the 70s to eight in the 80s. This thesis focuses on *The Miami Herald* in the 1980s as a time and place where a daily newspaper gained prestige and industry recognition through using literary journalism techniques which had previously been confined to magazine journalism.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

If you look at the newsrooms of the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, they are filled with former *Herald* reporters and photographers and editors. There are 90-some-odd *Miami Herald* newsroom people in the newsroom of the *Washington Post* today. There are dozens, and I don't know what the number is, at the *Times*. So, the *Herald* has always been a place that attracted great talent. Miami . . . it's an exciting place to be. (Hirsch, interview, 2004)

During the 1980s, *The Miami Herald* gained prestige through a talented staff that employed literary elements in daily newspaper writing. This thesis takes a qualitative look at the factors that led to the rise of the *Herald* and why literary journalism, usually relegated to magazine writing, was both accepted and encouraged as a means of telling compelling stories. By the end of this work, I hope to answer two research questions: What factors at *The Miami Herald* during the 1980s led to the paper's rise in terms of industry prestige? Second, why were these factors unique to Miami during this time?

Carl Hiaasen began at the *Herald* as a general assignment reporter and quickly was promoted to the investigations team. Under the tutelage of encouraging and established editors, Hiaasen combined excellent interviewing, research and writing skills with literary elements to inform readers of corruption within local government and shady deals that often saw the environment of South Florida on the losing end. Edna Buchanan worked the police beat at the *Herald* from day one until she left to write mystery novels full time. Working with her mentor Gene Miller, who won two of the first three Pulitzers in the history of the *Herald*, Buchanan used varied sentence structure, witty writing and

included tiny but colorful details to give proper sendoffs to murder victims for almost 20 years.

This thesis examines the influences, staff and organizational culture that saw *The Miami Herald* reach arguably its peak standing in terms of industry recognition during the 1980s. Using qualitative methods including interviews and textual analysis, I hope to create a grounded theory as to the factors that attributed to the rise of the *Herald* and events that changed the newsroom dynamic. While the findings are not intended to serve as a generalizable list of ingredients to create a newsroom that fosters creativity and inspires quality journalism, I hope it will explain the situation of the *Herald* in particular.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

American journalism, though seeking objectivity, has not always strived to be a vessel of neutrality. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known by his penname of Mark Twain, battled against dry, nothing-but-the-facts journalism. Twain and the crew of the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* in Nevada practiced what scholars have often called “frontier journalism,” a wobbly balance between “fictionalizing facts and factualizing fiction” (Purdy, 1999, p.54). Twain worked from a factual framework and used exaggeration, satire and other literary devices.

Distancing himself from mainstream journalism of the time, Twain often was the target of contempt and ridicule from other journalists and newspapers. Twain did not settle to stick just to the facts but included vivid description to provide context and impact. Although Twain used simple words, he still favored lengthy description. Interestingly, Twain chose common-language vocabulary instead of heavy words that marked the writer as more intelligent or above the reader. Twain’s inclusion of various literary devices into journalism caused his critics to question his work as exaggerated or even fabricated. The vanguard of the New Journalism would later be face with the same critique (Purdy, 1999, p. 53).

The influence of Twain and the writers of the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* were praised by some and dismissed by others. The partial credibility Twain helped gain for literary devices and styles in journalism were abused by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer near the turn of the twentieth century. Although Hearst and Pulitzer

are respected names today, their incessant battle for newspaper dominance saw American journalism become the casualty. Historians refer to the period as “Yellow Journalism,” with the enormous egos of Hearst and Pulitzer locked in an escalating battle of hyper-sensationalizing news at the expense of objectivity and fact. Hearst is often blamed for starting the Spanish-American War after printing photographs detailing how Spanish saboteurs could have attached and detonated an underwater mine to sink the U.S.S. Maine in the Havana, Cuba harbor (Buschini, 2000).

According to Anthony Smith, the media were questioned after World War I for its break with traditional journalism techniques. The press adopted a more objective philosophy focused on consensus that was “very different from the emphasis on facts that had helped the press through the period of its growth earlier in the century” (Smith, 1980, p. 61). The press “fostered the collection of information on the basis of a special diction, which restricted the definition of a statement to that which could be assented to by all (Smith, 1980, p. 61). Essentially, all nuance and color was stripped from news reporting, leaving only the most basic facts and verifiable statements that could be observed by everyone. Smith calls this the reality that remained “after the combined skepticism of the age were stripped away from the reporter’s vision of the world” (Smith, 1999, p. 61).

This adherence to objectivity and verifiability remained the cornerstones of journalism until the 1960s. Unrelated to media and mass communication, many researchers in the social sciences (psychology, sociology, social psychology, etc.) had an epistemological shift during this time. Positivists view the world as having a reality and looking to research findings as a means to determine the one truth. During this time period, many social science researchers began adopting a relativist instead of a positivist

epistemology, or perception of the nature of reality. Relativists view the world as having multiple realities where what is “real” differs depending on the experiences of the individual.

A large amount of scholarship already has looked at the causes and techniques of the New Journalism. Though it is impossible to draw exact lines as to a specific time/place/event creating the term, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson commonly are considered stewards of the New Journalism in the 1960s and 70s. All three had different approaches and philosophies, but all three combined to bring the term to prominence as an implementation of journalistic nonfiction (Weber, 1980).

New Journalists differed in mindset by going beyond just reporting the facts in traditional, dry, inverted-pyramid style and structure. Though some critics say the New Journalism crossed the lines of objectivity held as the cornerstone of journalism, proponents chose to explore American culture, politics and society in new ways, often injecting themselves in the scenery. Lester Markel described the New Journalists as “deep-see reporters” who immersed themselves to get to the bottom of issues, topics and events while still paying attention to the surface perceptions (Flippen, 1974, pp. 10-11, 160, 172).

Essentially, proponents of the New Journalism saw themselves as culture critics, responsible for uncovering the color and dirt of a situation to bring the true meaning and importance forth. They were not news reporters that only gave facts and direct quotations. They also were not editorialists that relied on opinions and feelings. They considered inclusion of observation and narrative description essential to painting an accurate account of an event, topic or issue.

The American political and cultural landscape of the 1960s gave journalists an abundance of fodder for experimentation. The space race heated up with the USSR putting the first man in space in 1961, with Alan Shepard following a month later for the United States. And the failed Bay of Pigs insurrection to overthrow the Castro government in Cuba increased tension with the USSR. In October of 1962, the USSR installed offensive missiles in Cuba aimed at the United States. President Kennedy set a barricade preventing Soviet ships from entering the Caribbean. Nuclear war was avoided as the USSR ordered the ships to turn away from Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis marked a significant change in the United States' perception of the Cold War and the place of America in the arena of international affairs.

Conflict in Vietnam was in its infant stage at the beginning of the 1960s. The Cuban Missile Crisis was followed by the rise of Mao Zedong's attempted Cultural Revolution. The United States steadily increased its presence in Vietnam after 1965 to stem communism. The decade saw the march of the Civil Rights movement, accompanied by protests, lynchings and race riots. President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X were assassinated. Vietnam continued to dominate the American mindset throughout the early 1970s, accentuated by the shooting of four student protestors at Kent State University on May 4, 1970.

War protests, the hippie movement and the rise of other counter-culture youth identities provided all the right ingredients needed to drive the New Journalism. These were not stories and events that fit into the traditional hard-news format of mainstream journalism at the time.

The American newspaper industry clung to strict objectivity even as this philosophy continued to be challenged by a new generation of reporters exposed to the relativist perspectives at universities (Smith, 1980, p. 62). The escalation of the Vietnam War led to widespread disagreement as to the role of the United States and the role of the media as an arbiter of the objective truth. A growing number of writers threw away the restraints of objectivity in favor of truths unable to be conveyed through fact alone. Many journalists did not trust information coming from the government, though it was stated as fact. Fed up with serving merely as a conduit, Tom Wicker says, “reporters began to engage in the most objective journalism of all – seeing for themselves, judging for themselves, backing up their judgments with their observation, often at the risk of life and limb, and the government’s wrath” (Wicker, 1978, p. 7). Wicker goes on to say:

Not that the facts are unimportant, or may be ignored, or tampered with, anymore in political reporting than in other forms of journalism. But in political journalism, what can be assumed from facts, sometimes what can be plausibly suggested despite the facts, is often more important than the facts themselves – which may not really be facts anyway. (Wicker, 1978, p. 51)

Whether loved or hated, journalists and media critics of the time acknowledged changing ideals of acceptable journalism. Ronald Weber stated in 1974, “The New Journalism is here, is with us, is real and, in its total effect as well as some of its parts, is new. To deny this is to deny the evidence before our eyes” (Weber, 1974, p.14).

Wolfe, Talese, Thompson and other followers of the New Journalism relied on direct observation and intuition as indispensable tools to find a truth. Each of these three departed from objectivity in differing degrees. Hunter Thompson is considered the wildest and most detached from the journalism establishment. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, Hunter Thompson

never ends up at his destination. Instead of covering a motorcycle race in the Nevada desert, Thompson details using any and every drug in a psychedelic journey through Las Vegas searching for the so-called American Dream. Although this is an extreme example, it illustrates why many journalists and media critics of the time had difficulty taking Thompson seriously.

One of Tom Wolfe's most noted early pieces, "There Goes That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," ran in *Esquire* as a happy accident. Wolfe was a feature writer at the *New York Herald Tribune* and came to *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes in 1963 with the idea of covering the teenage subculture of car customization in California. Hayes, with some reservation, agreed and paid Wolfe's way. Months later, Hayes still was without a single page of copy from Wolfe. Without a story, or even an idea of when it might appear, Hayes sent a photographer to a traveling exhibit of customized cars that had come to New Jersey. Hayes wanted a studio portrait of one of the wildest. The photo was sent to run in the next issue, which had to be at the engraver in Chicago within two weeks (Polsgrove, 1995, p. 86).

Hayes told managing editor Byron Dobell to call Wolfe and get the story. Dobell gave Wolfe a deadline of Friday before the Monday the photograph had to be sent to the engraver. The words wouldn't come. On Friday, Hayes called his automotive editor and asked if she could write the story from Wolfe's notes. Dobell told Wolfe to type out his notes and send them immediately. Wolfe started typing at 8 p.m. and kept going until just after 6 a.m. Wolfe typed a stream-of-consciousness, first-person perspective to Dobell. Dobell removed the "Dear Byron," from the beginning of the notes, practically made no

edits and sent Wolfe's notes to run as the story (Polsgrove, 1995, p.86). Hayes later wrote:

From this decision, and at the very instant, came the first words of an extraordinary new voice – italics, ellipses, exclamation marks, shifting tenses, arcane references, every bit of freight and baggage he had collected out of his past, from newspaper bets back through postgraduate studies in art history at Yale. (Polsgrove, 1995, p. 86)

This piece helped give credibility to the inclusion of style and context in journalism. Many critics never agreed with or accept the New Journalism, but few can discount the far-reaching influences of the New York journalists during the 1960s and 70s. Hayes described Wolfe's piece as a prime example of how the relationship between editor and writer can bring forth what could not have been created by either alone (Polsgrove, 1995, p. 86).

Situations seldom arise where writers and editors work together to truly foster creativity and excellent writing in addition to factual reporting. And when these cooperate ingredients have come together, the literary journalism products have been confined almost exclusively to magazine writing. While mainstream newspaper writing adheres to an inverted pyramid template, only allowing the straight facts in an often naïve effort to obliterate any subjectivity on behalf the writer, this paper will look at another time and place where literary journalism accomplished great things. In this work, I will showcase *The Miami Herald* in the 1980s as a melting pot of talented writers, motivating editors and fantastic environment that sparked a liftoff in the prestige and critical acclaim of the newspaper.

While I do not contend that Miami's culture, society and political dynamics played a required role in the *Herald's* ascension, some of the events of the period researched

should be mentioned. Several events in 1980 had profound consequences on cultural and political relationships in Miami. On March 8, 1980, Fidel Castro hinted of possible mass emigration during a speech. The idea of letting Cubans flee followed on the heels of several boat hijackings. At the beginning of April a six Cubans crashed a bus through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana and are granted asylum. Almost 11,000 Cubans assemble at the Peruvian embassy and are in turn granted asylum. Following this, President Jimmy Carter announces that the U.S. will accept 3,500 Cuban refugees. On April 20, Castro opens the port of Mariel for anyone who wishes to leave the country. Hundreds of boats arrive from the United States within the week. By May, more than 3,000 Cuban refugees land in Miami and the Florida Keys per day (*The Legacy of Mariel*, 2005).

All in all, some 125,000 refugees fled Cuba. During the boat lift, Castro had an unknown number of criminals and mentally ill persons released and loaded onto boats headed for the United States. When this became known, Carter began a crackdown (*The Legacy of Mariel*, 2005). Such rapid influx of people to Miami and South Florida certainly caused an unsettling of the status quo.

In the middle of the boat lift timeline, Miami also dealt with the McDuffie riots. On May 17, 1980, Edna Buchanan broke the story that four Miami policeman were acquitted for the killing of black insurance agent Arthur McDuffie and trying to cover up the incident by falsifying police reports (Finkel, 1985). Following a police chase, McDuffie was handcuffed and beaten to death. Three days of rioting led to the death of 18 people and more than \$100 million in damages (Driscoll, 2005). Though this paper does not claim that these or other political/cultural/social events led to the *Herald's* rise in

prestige, they certainly gave reporters more ammunition to write compelling stories that could utilize literary techniques to add nuance and context compared to less culturally diverse urban centers.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY

Choosing to look qualitatively at *The Miami Herald* primarily during the 1980s falls under the category of a case study, since this work is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).” For this case the “bounded system” will look at the writers, editors and organizational structure/culture of *The Miami Herald* during its rise in the 1980s and the aftermath. Although the time frame of the paper’s rise could be extended to the 1970s, limiting the growth to the 1980s narrows the focus of this work on a particular group of established editors and up-and-coming writers who used literary techniques in daily newspaper writing. This work hopes to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: What factors at *The Miami Herald* during the 1980s led to the paper’s rise in terms of industry prestige?

RQ2: Why were these factors unique to Miami during this time?

Case studies, as a conceptual framework, do not necessarily need a theoretical basis. However, this study uses a post-positivist paradigm. This paradigm has an ontology, or nature of reality, where we assume a real reality to exist, though fundamentally flawed “human intellectual mechanisms” and the constantly changing nature of phenomena make it impossible to reach this one reality with absolute certainty (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Though this work cites the New Journalism in New York and

“frontier journalism” as other cases of literary techniques used and accepted in journalism, the author does not believe or try to find any precise formula that exists between these two cases and *The Miami Herald*. Setting out, the author proposes that the acceptance, or at least tolerance, of the New Journalism had a profound impact that validated creative news writing at *The Miami Herald*.

In regards to epistemology, the researcher contends to be objective and allow the textual analysis and interview participants to tell what it was like to work at *The Miami Herald* in the 1980s. Since the researcher was not able to observe the newspaper and organizational culture during this time period, this work relies on participant observation to describe the relationships between writers, editors and the business side of the newspaper. Though the author freely admits to having preconceived notions as to certain factors essential to a productive and prosperous newsroom, so many other cultural and political factors apply to this system, the New Journalism, frontier journalism and other cases that an exact set of ingredients that can be applied to any newsroom to drive creativity seems impossible to find. However, this work makes an attempt to build a grounded theory of what elements made *The Miami Herald* during this time period a magnet for talent that grew and excelled through the use of literary elements in daily newspaper writing.

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss first articulated “grounded theory” for sociology in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Instead of entering the field with an a priori theory, researchers using grounded theory realize and discard preconceived notions and let the research build to a theory that will not be visible until the study has concluded. Unlike other research methodologies that flow from data collection to analyzing data and

then to writing, ground theory employs a repeating process. This process consists of going into the field to collect data, analyzing that data and then going back to the field to collect more data. The researcher uses a “constant comparative method” to collect and analyze data until a theoretical saturation is reached, meaning further interviews or data collection are not likely to contribute anything new to the study (Creswell, 1998, pp. 55-57). At this point, a grounded theory will emerge. It will be articulated toward the end of the study and may take the form of a narrative statement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Using grounded theory requires the researcher to bracket. Through bracketing, the researcher acknowledges preconceived notions and puts them aside so as to not undermine or steer the research. During foundational research and review of the literature for this study, unintentional connections were created between the political and cultural environment of Miami in the 1980s to New York during the rise of the New Journalism. Acknowledging these preconceptions, research methods were designed accordingly to limit the voice of the author in the research findings until the time for articulation and theory building.

The primary method for data collection consisted of interviews and textual analysis. Although the list of accomplished *Herald* alumni is extensive and reaches into nearly every area of printed media, this work focuses on the relationships between writers Carl Hiaasen and Edna Buchanan and their editors, primarily Gene Miller. While Dave Barry may be the most famous name from the cast of characters at *The Miami Herald* during the time frame of this study, he is known as a humor columnist and not a news writer, and therefore is not included as a journalist using literary elements in news writing.

Carl Hiaasen's writing can be difficult to classify. It took the shape of columns, features and in-depth investigation, though always being rooted in factual storytelling and vivid descriptions. Edna Buchanan worked the police beat. She retold spot news and general assignment reporting with grit and tone usually reserved for detective novels. Gene Miller served as recruiter, editor and mentor for the *Herald's* talent pool during the 1980s, while still writing. Before the 1980s, *The Miami Herald* only had received three Pulitzer prizes in its history. Miller received two of the prizes for his reporting in 1967 and 1976. Miller won them both for in-depth reporting that resulted in freeing men wrongfully convicted for murder. Under Miller's watch, the *Herald* staff picked up six Pulitzers during the decade of the 80s and later four in the 90s.

Central to this research is an interview conducted with Carl Hiaasen concerning the relationships among writers, editors and management at *The Miami Herald* during its ascension in the 1980s and how these relationships have changed now at the *Herald* and throughout newsrooms in general. Edna Buchanan, who now writes detective novels, could not be reached to comment on her relationship with Gene Miller and Miller's influence on her writing and the writing of other talent at the *Herald*. Pete Weitzel, who worked as an editor during the 80s, and was a close friend of the late Miller, spoke about Miller's role at the *Herald* as a reporter, editor and mentor to Buchanan and other young writers. To understand the newsroom culture dynamic, "Covering the Cops" by Calvin Trillin (Trillin, 1986) was indispensable.

Writing examples for both Hiaasen and Buchanan were taken from microfiche of newspaper archives from 1985 and 1986. Content analysis was performed on the front page and local sections of *The Miami Herald* for the first three days of each month over

this two-year time span. All stories authored by Carl Hiaasen and Edna Buchanan were analyzed, with the exact headline, brief descriptions and specific examples of literary style and/or elements noted. The textual analysis originally was planned to examine from 1985 to 1988, selected arbitrarily. As more literature was reviewed, 1986 emerged as an important year because Buchanan received a Pulitzer Prize in general reporting, mostly for her writing from 1985. Theoretical saturation was achieved after an analysis of two years. Further analysis would have found numerous examples of literary technique, but nothing stylistically unique to examples already noted could be expected.

Textual analysis was applied to the first three days of each month, resulting in a total of 72 days used for analysis. This method was selected instead of examining a continuous period such as a single month of each year to limit repetition that could occur due to hot stories or issues (Riffe, Aust and Lacy, 1993). The purpose of the content analysis was not to arrive at generalizable categories that the writings of Hiaasen and Buchanan could be classified into, but rather to acquire a large sample of different styles used on a variety of story topics.

Through the aforementioned methods and supporting textual analysis and interviews from other *Herald* staff, the research hoped to discover the major factors internal and external to the newspaper that saw the *Herald* arguably rise to its most prolific and respected position in the history of the paper. Although the primary interest of this research looks at the newsroom, examining the organizational environment of the *Herald* as a company and piece of Knight Ridder paints a more accurate account of the atmosphere and culture of the paper as a whole.

All interviews were recorded. In-person and phone interviews were recorded on microcassette and transcribed verbatim. When a real-time interview was not possible due to scheduling constraints by a participant, a group of open-ended questions were e-mailed and returned. Though an audit trail of the daily research progress was not created, explanations of research design changes will be explained.

Originally, this research was to be based on long interviews conducted with Hiaasen, Buchanan and Miller. Letters were written to the three requesting interviews either in print form and/or electronically, depending on what type of contact information was available. Hiaasen responded in a postcard saying he would like to help but currently was busy moving and finishing a book. He said he would call when he was available. After several phone calls, messages and e-mails left for Miller at *The Miami Herald*, one reply for an interview request was received. In an e-mail, Miller was asked if he would be willing to talk about the newsroom environment at *The Miami Herald* during the 1980s. In the single response, he said that he was not involved in environmental reporting. Clearly the author failed in communicating the intent of the interview request. A prompt reply to his response went unanswered and no subsequent communication attempts were successful. Gene Miller died on June 17, 2005 from cancer. His longtime friend and coworker Pete Weitzel spoke over the phone about Miller and his relationship with Edna Buchanan, whom he helped win a Pulitzer in 1986. The researcher attempted to reach Buchanan through e-mail, the only contact information available, and did not receive a reply.

Six months after receiving the post card reply from Hiaasen, no other contact had been made. Thankfully the researcher located an e-mail address for Hiaasen. Two days

after sending him an e-mail, Hiaasen called and scheduled a time for a phone interview. His busy schedule did not allow for an in-person interview. Information regarding Buchanan and Miller was taken from existing literature and interviews with staff other than the two themselves. The bulk of information on Buchanan comes from published articles and an interview with Pete Weitzel.

CHAPTER 4 CARL HIAASEN

“I would take out the entire corporate leadership of most newspaper companies and lobotomize them in some mass ceremony. They are not journalists. They are managers of a stock interest. They are executives with no imagination whatsoever,” said Carl Hiaasen (Hiaasen, interview, 2005).

Carl Hiaasen was born in west Fort Lauderdale, Fla. in 1953. Growing up with the Everglades as his backyard, playground and classroom, Hiaasen watched land developers push back and contain the wilderness to create sprawling suburbs and strip malls.

Through his first-hand experiences, Hiaasen became a watchdog for Floridian environmental issues and the government/political arrangements that often saw the Everglades on the losing side.

Hiaasen is a kind of modern-day muckraker. He has seen the graft, corruption and indifference for the good of Florida manifested through environmental destruction and law-enforcement shenanigans. While little of Hiaasen’s newspaper writing can be considered neutral, he maintains a consistent view of what is right and wrong and what should be changed. Although he lambastes and ridicules, his positions are extensively researched and consistently held. He champions issues apolitically. He does not condemn land development as a whole, but views development in South Florida as a land grab by those wishing to make a fast buck instead of following a policy of managed and responsible growth (Seymour, 1991, p. 28).

Hiaasen began in collegiate newspapers writing a column for *The Emory Wheel* at Emory University in Atlanta. He transferred to the University of Florida and continued to

write columns for the student-run *Florida Alligator*, renamed the *Independent Florida Alligator* in 1973 when it moved off campus to prevent university administration from having editorial oversight. Although he began his coursework at the University of Florida in the broadcasting track, the influence of professors Jean Chance and the late Buddy Davis caused a switch to print journalism. Hiaasen says of Davis:

He was tremendous. I don't know anybody in the business who had Buddy Davis and wasn't profoundly affected by working with him. Opinion writing was the course – I think that's what it was called at the time.... With Buddy, what he taught you was, if you are going to have the audacity to write an opinion piece, editorial column whatever it happened to be, you better get off the fence; you better write what you say; you better have a target and say what needs to be done to fix the problem you are writing about, and hit home, have your research and your facts right. (Hiaasen cited in Pleasants, 2003, p. 246)

Regardless of any criticism of his style and opinions, Hiaasen is certain to make his feelings obvious. Hiaasen did write the occasional general-assignment story for classroom obligations, but the bulk of his time was spent on his column (Hiaasen, interview, 2005). Hiaasen graduated in 1974 and went to work for *Cocoa Today*, now named *Florida Today*, as a general assignment reporter. Additionally, Hiaasen had opportunities to write for *Cocoa Today's* weekend magazine:

I went onto a staff that really opened things up when you suddenly go from writing 15-inch dailies to writing 90 to 100 inches on a story [for the magazine]. You better learn how to flex your writing muscles. It's a much different exercise than knocking out a daily, magazine writing in general and magazine writing for newspapers in particular. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

In 1976, *The Miami Herald* hired Hiaasen as a general-assignment reporter.

Hiaasen also worked on an investigations team under the tutelage of Gene Miller, the *Herald's* most accomplished writer with two Pulitzer prizes under his belt. Although Miller was still a writer, he also served as a de facto editor for several young writers including Hiaasen and Edna Buchanan. Hiaasen speaks of the importance of editors:

It can go two ways in newspapers: you can get the creative impulses beaten out of you by bad editors or you can have good editors who encourage you to take chances and try to do different things and take it to a higher level. I was lucky because the *Herald* has always been a writers' newspaper. One reason it attracts a lot of talented kids is because they do value good writing. Most papers don't. Most papers, right now with what's going on in the newspaper world, they want you to be short. It's not depth reporting, and they certainly don't want you to be too creative with your writing. It's pretty much straightforward unless you're writing about celebrities, of course. Then you can go nuts, because that's where our business is headed. They'll give you 20 inches on J-Lo anytime, but you may get 15 inches on the carbombing in Mosul today. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Hiaasen also wrote for *Tropic*, the *Herald's* Sunday magazine, for a couple of years. He credits his time working on *Tropic* as a huge help for his writing, particularly developing a tactical approach to writing longer investigative pieces. Hiaasen says:

You just bring a whole different approach to it on the bigger stuff – the pace of the storytelling, the way information is parsed out – you don't have to go for the inverted pyramid lead. You've got a long time to tell a story and build drama and employ some of the devices of literature in getting people engrossed whether it's a feature story or a heavy, important story. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Although compelling writing is crucial for in-depth reporting, Hiaasen believes the same approach should be taken for all types of newswriting:

It's the same chore, and you're still a storyteller. If you're covering some dreary zoning board meeting or whether you're covering the crash of a 737, you still have to go out, gather the information using all of your senses and then tell a story in a compelling way. That's any journalist's job, because if you can't tell a story, no one is going to read it. And if no one is going to read it, you're wasting your time and you're wasting the space. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

For Hiaasen, coming to work at *The Miami Herald* was like going back to journalism school. Miller and Bill Montalbano were “incredible gatherers of facts and information,” but both emphasized the need to hook the reader into a dramatic story. And this hook often took form by starting with an anecdotal lead and then “snapping the reader back in his chair with an abbreviated sentence that is used like a blunt instrument (Trillin, 1986).” Miller's instrument is known simply as the Miller Chop. While Edna

Buchanan stands as the valedictorian of the Miller school, Hiaasen also learned that creativity and the use of style and variety in newswriting was not only accepted, but it was encouraged in the *Herald* newsroom. Hiaasen speaks of Miller's encouragement for creativity:

And the fact that Miller had two Pulitzer Prizes sort of inoculated him from certain low-level editors who didn't agree or who couldn't handle the idea of editing a story that had a literary theme to it. There were editors that recoiled at that idea. You tell it straight, just be straight. Well, if you've got the goods, you tell it as dramatically as possible and make it as human as possible. (Hiaasen, 2005, interview)

Prior to Gene Miller, *The Miami Herald* had only received one Pulitzer Prize in the history of the newspaper. Though Miller's talent and influence, the *Herald* went from one Pulitzer in the 60s and one in the 70s (both won by Miller) to six in the 80s, including one by Miller's protégé Buchanan. Hiaasen says of Miller:

Gene believed that no matter what kind of project we were working on, the whole trick is impact. And there is no impact without any involvement of your readers. You have to get them involved in a story. If you can't get them past the jump, you've failed not only as a writer but as a journalist. That was Gene's point, and he was right. It made for a hell of a lot more interesting newspaper. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Although Hiaasen emphasizes the need for impact, he acknowledges accuracy and adherence to factual storytelling as the most important components of newspaper writing. But including descriptive details is just as important. Objectivity in journalism does not mean writing should be devoid of color and detail. Details show instead of tell, allow readers to absorb facts and context, and give readers the ability to comprehend and understand a situation or issue. Hiaasen describes his process for in-depth reporting:

If you're running an investigative series that's running six or seven or eight days on the front page, that's a hell of a hard thing to get a reader to stick with. It was 20 years ago, and it is now in the age of USA Today. As thin as most newspapers are and with so little space, it better be organized and it better move the whole way. If it's a touchy subject, obviously you're going to be getting lawyered along the way.

In addition to the literary gymnastics you're trying to do, obviously your main concern is getting the facts right and getting the story to be fair. And you're dealing with not just several layers of editors but also lawyers. And for that, if you don't have a good editor that is going to do battle for you and be there with you, then you're screwed. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Being objective and fair does not mean the writing has to be bland. But, unfortunately, creativity is the casualty at most daily newspapers. And that is why *The Miami Herald* particularly during the 1980s stands out. While in-depth newswriting using literary elements generally is reserved for news magazines, the *Herald* was fortunate enough to have a prestigious writer/editor like Gene Miller who could inspire and mentor young writers to express their creativity while still adhering to journalistic principles of fairness and accuracy. Hiaasen on the importance of good editors:

If anything is the crisis point in newspapers right now it's getting that level of writing because you don't have that level of editing in most cases. You have editors that are extremely timid and typically who are not themselves and were not themselves great writers or reporters. And they're now editing reporters that are far more talented than they were. The best editors will recognize that and play to the reporter's strengths. The most insecure editors will try to smother whatever creative impulses reporters have. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Hiaasen's attention to detail and undeniable dedication to righting what he sees as social, political, cultural and environmental injustice brought him quick success. Hiaasen was promoted to investigations by Jim Savage, head of the investigations team, both because of his obvious talent and pursuit by the *St. Petersburg Times*. Miller, Patrick Malone and Hiaasen worked on an eight part series in 1979 exposing "Dangerous Doctors" of South Florida (Greenlee, 1997, p. 60). Hiaasen also received praise from Jim Savage, for his insight and skill at efficient newsgathering during an investigative series of drug smuggling through Key West (Savage cited in Greenlee, 1997, p. 59). Both series were Pulitzer Prize finalists.

Medical malpractice, drug enforcement (or lack thereof) and corrupt zoning enforcement are certainly newsworthy, though these injustices do not fall under the heading of objectivity. Crooks and swindlers get away with crimes because nobody knows about them. A reporter taking sides in a political issue with two defensible sides draws fire, but the same standard should not apply to all news writing. If the true purpose of newspapers is to benefit the social good and expose corruption, in addition to reporting daily spot news and happenings, it remains crucial to take a side and champion the ethical and legal. Regardless of race, culture or creed, corruption is corruption, unless you're the one with the stuffed pocket. Gene Seymour writes in a profile of Hiaasen from the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*:

Yet for all his good-guy composure, all you have to do is get Hiaasen talking or writing about developers, dope dealers and various other forms of what he likes to call 'human sludge' and what they're doing to the physical and emotional terrain of his home turf, and he is no longer an easygoing fellow. He's at war. (Seymour, 1991, p. 26)

In 1985, after recently finishing an investigative series on Bahamian corruption, Hiaasen was offered a news column. He also began work on his first solo novel, *Tourist Season*. His satirical style that remained dormant since his University of Florida days was turned loose. Although Hiaasen lashes out with ferocity at crooks and injustice, he is driven by his convictions in what should be regardless of what is. Former *Herald* colleague Gene Weingarten says of Hiaasen:

Most city columnists are paid handsomely to have two or three outrageous opinions a week, which leads to a prepackaged recipe of outrage for its own sake. Carl's triumph as a columnist is that he writes with a dry sense of outrage that's genuine. (cited in Seymour, 1991, p. 26)

In a January 1986 news column, Hiaasen honestly and bluntly reminds his readers of the seemingly endless string of corruption scandals involving police, DEA, FBI and Customs agents:

I watched them on TV the other night, the beefcake cops charged with murder. As they capered and grinned and blew kisses at the courtroom cameras, I couldn't help but wonder if steroids destroy brain tissue.

Imagine: You're a young policeman.

You are hauled out of your home in the wee hours, handcuffed, fingerprinted and hustled bleary-eyed into the Dade County Jail like a bum.

You are accused of a triple homicide, of racketeering, of stealing cocaine and selling it on the street, of using your badge and oath as instruments of crime. You are accused of being the worst thing that a cop can be – crooked.

Yet when you and your weightlifter pals go to court the next morning, what emotion do you display while the whole city is watching?

Arrogance. You mug for the cameras, laughing and joking while every good and decent cop on the streets feels a hot knot tightening in the gut. The feeling is shame.

But you don't have any. (Hiaasen, 1986a)

Most journalists shy away from calling it as they see it. Not Hiaasen. Any policeman or public official should be upset to get arrested and sent to court for violating the foundation of their work: protecting the public. Blowing kisses at courtroom cameras is a detail that would probably be left in the typical reporter's notebook for a hard-news story. However, Hiaasen has the talent of information gathering, the support of his editors and a talent for biting satire that lend a unique voice to *The Miami Herald* that few news columnists can equal. Writing a rundown of police corruption is an important job for a journalist and a story that should be taken seriously. But when politicians and those designated to serve the public good act like imbeciles, Hiaasen lets loose. From "Big questions unanswered in punching case" on August 1, 1986:

Who punched James Blew?

If you're like me, you've been lying awake nights worrying about this dark mystery, and what it means to the future of Dade County.

James Blew is the Dow Chemical executive who got clobbered in the face at a golf banquet July 2 after arguing with County Manger Sergio Pereira over seating arrangements.

Pereira thought Blew's group was sitting in the wrong seats. Blew disagreed. The two men exchanged opinions and then a third man huffed forward and clouted Blew in the face, causing a wound that required 13 stitches.

All this took place at Rickenbacker's restaurant following the aptly named Crazy American Golf Tournament. The banquet room must have been as dim as a cave because nobody seems to have seen the blow against Blew.

Mayor Steve Clark was present but, characteristically, claims to be unaware of what happened. Metro Police Director Bobby Jones was also there but says he was preoccupied at the bar. In fact, the place was crawling with police brass, but they all seemed to be looking the other way when the infamous fist was thrown. Not since the Clay-Liston bout in 1965 has there been such a phantom punch.

As for Sergio Pereira, he claims – are you ready? – that he witnessed no punching, but assumed from Blew's bloody face that the poor fellow was suffering a nosebleed from high blood pressure. In retrospect, perhaps Sergio would have been better off with the Bobby Jones excuse.

At any rate, I think we get the flavor of what a classy get-together this was.

By the time the assault report was made public, all mention of the county manager and his alleged role in the fracas had been carefully blanked out. The intrigue deepened when it became known that high-ranking police officials had ruminated of James Blew's complaint for three weeks and done nothing. A vague explanation for the delay was offered along these lines:

- a) Detectives were awaiting the go-ahead from their superiors;
- b) Their superiors were in a glassy trance induced by aliens from another planet.

The police department's recalcitrance dissolved only after legal scholars pointed out that punching a person in the eye is a crime even in South Florida. Battery, it's called (Hiaasen, 1986c).

A phantom punch and 13 stitches on the face at a local golf tournament is a dream come true for most reporters. And when it surrounds a public official and a Fortune 500 company executive it's gold. It has almost all of the big-time news values: conflict, proximity, prominence, timeliness and certainly oddity (Bridges, 1989, p.333). But running this story as a traditional, hard-news item with inverted pyramid structure neglects the significance readers should take away. An adult splitting the face of another is battery. And when the event is filled with policeman and others sworn to uphold the

law and bring criminals to justice, no one saw anything? Hiaasen uses satire to show how incredible some of these statements sound:

When you write about crooks and politicians as a columnist, they get upset, but they don't get completely crazy if you just stand on a soapbox and preach; but if you make fun of them, if you use satire, nothing lacerates them worse. Nothing makes them squirm more or makes them more humiliated (Hiaasen cited in Craig, 1992).

Hiaasen continually attacks absurdities that pass as daily occurrences in South Florida. In regards to political coverage, Hiaasen often uses his column to remind Miami voters of past decisions and crimes Miami voters should not be quick to forget (Hiaasen, 1985b). Hiaasen says of his general pessimism toward American politics:

The bottom line is that politics are extremely comical, and the politics of the country are full of hypocrisy and bullshit. And most of the coverage is lamentably serious. Anyone who has been on the bus and seen the same campaign speech 25 times in the same day, whether it was George W. Bush or John Kerry, it's very hard to take yourself seriously. It's very hard to take the process seriously. The stakes are very high but the actual ceremony of politicking in this country is dismal and embarrassing and corrosive to the human spirit. And it ought to be rendered that way. If journalism's job is to accurately portray reality, then you certainly have to accurately portray the farcical things as well as the stuff that's serious and heavy. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

This statement by Hiaasen raises an important question as to the nature and purpose of journalism. If journalism exists to inform the masses and give the public information that can be interpreted and used to make informed decisions, then what is real should be objective, though hardly neutral. Hiaasen, along with most young reporters of his era, was influenced by journalism in the age of Watergate, in particular the political coverage in Rolling Stone and by Tim Krause and Hunter S. Thompson (Hiaasen, interview, 2005). The New Journalism of the time "threw the shackles off" superficial political reporting. Hiaasen notes:

The idea of a Hunter Thompson experience at the Hugh Humphrey campaign and things like that were magnificent and uproarious. [They] would never find their

way into a newspaper back then, but now they're quoted. When Hunter died, now it's quoted almost wistfully in *The New York Times* and all of the establishment papers, the stuff that couldn't get in when he was alive. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Although the New Journalism of the 1960s and 70s was kept in magazines and out of newspapers, it had an undeniable influence on a generation of journalists. Hiaasen adds:

[It was] stuff you could never get away with in a newspaper, but it was accurate; scathingly accurate in terms of political coverage. And also the freedom and whimsy and experimental things they did with the language. There was no reason it had to be stodgy and dull. There was no reason you couldn't have fun with an important story and bring the kind of structure and occasional touch of heresy into describing things. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Reading Hiaasen's work, it is easy to get the sense that he truly has fun writing.

Although his newspaper column is best known for attacking corruption, Hiaasen is far from a one-trick dog. Regardless of the topic, it is rare for Hiaasen not to come up with something intelligent, provocative and often hysterical. One of his earliest columns, "Tanning action proves beauty can be beastly," gives a first-person account of a promotional event for the Miss Universe pageant where something called a "Squirtmobile" was supposed to "dispense" suntan lotion on 10 contestants. After describing initial problems preventing the "mass squirting" he had hoped for, Hiaasen writes:

Soon the Squirtmobile was in place and the reigning Miss Universe, *the* Miss Universe, was told to get inside. This was the new plan: As the Squirtmobile sped down the crowded shore, Miss Universe would dangle her legs out back and pass bottles of Coppertone to contestants prancing after the little truck.

Something you see every day at the beach, right? And safe, too.

After about the sixth take, the TV producers were getting hacked off. The contestants were running too fast, then too slow, then waving when they weren't supposed to. And the swimmers! They kept staring at the camera, screwing up the shots. "If you keep looking this way, we'll have to do it all over again, and these girls are getting very, very hot," warned a big shot TV guy named Ray on a megaphone.

Then something terrible happened.

Somebody yelled, “Action!” and the Squirtmobile roared away with two stunning beauty queens in pursuit – all according to script. But suddenly the contraption hit some soft sand and threw about half a ton of beach straight into one of the contestant’s face and hair.

I don’t think I’ve ever felt as sorry for anyone.

The woman (Miss Austria, according to a chaperone) was trying to smile and be a good sport, but behind her smoky eyes you could tell what she was thinking – that it would be nice to use a claw hammer on the jerk who dreamed up this stunt. (Hiaasen, 1985)

In addition to being uproarious and fun, Hiaasen makes an important statement in this piece. The Florida legislature gave \$500,000 to the pageant to make sure Miami would play host. Also, the marketing event closed sections of the beach and inconvenienced residents and tourists for “low-class commercialism” that has no perceivable benefit, direct or indirect, to the city or its people.

Hiaasen bounces from scorching crooks to ridiculing stupidity to describing the human condition without missing a beat. A March 3, 1986 feature story details a prisoner’s demons concerning his mother’s suicide when he was two years old. Hiaasen does not apologize for John Daniel Washburn attacking a cop with a knife in a bar fight, but he sympathizes with a man who has spent his life as an orphan, unaware of his seven brothers and sisters, with the thought his mother ended her life by putting a bullet in her own head. Through a happy accident at a medical examiner’s office, Washburn is reunited with a sister and learns the truth of his unhappy mother who killed herself by drinking roach poison. Hiaasen writes, “It’s impossible to know what would have happened to the boy if his mother had not swallowed the poison. It’s impossible to know if his life would have been better, only that it would have been different (Hiaasen, 1986b).

Readers can relate and sympathize with events beyond control changing lives forever. But Hiaasen takes the gloves off when he feels lives and environments are changed or destroyed by greed. Influenced by his first-hand experiences watching greedy politicians and developers irresponsible destroy the Florida Everglades, Hiaasen says:

I just grew up feeling this way. It's not saving a tree for the sake of saving a tree. If you save enough trees, you stop a lot of the graft and criminal behavior going on between politicians. They're selling their vote for what everyone wants – a piece of land. For that waterfront or lake front or estuary. (cited in Bowman, 2000)

Hiaasen's outrage and frustration pour out of his column and into his novels. And his novels must be mentioned because of the common themes that carry from his newspaper writing into his fiction writing. Many of his novels center around an environmental issue he covered in his columns, including illegal dumping (*Sick Puppy*, Hiaasen, 2000) and Everglades destruction aided by a sample-doctoring biologist who hides the evidence of fertilizers being poured into the wetlands by an agribusiness tycoon (*Skinny Dip*, Hiaasen, 2004). Though he sheds light on eco-crooks in his columns, he reserves personal punishment for his fiction. Regarding the villain in *Sick Puppy*, Hiaasen says, "The thing down in Florida is you can get in your car and drive by the carnage. See the bulldozers fill in the estuary. I just always wanted to put one of these bastards into a book and have terrible things happen to him (cited in Bowman, 2000)."

New York-based columnist, novelist and long-time idol of Hiaasen (Hiaasen, interview 2005), Pete Hamill says of Hiaasen, "If you think of the columns as drawings and the novels as paintings, they make up an absolutely coherent and consistent world view. And it's the world view that separates Carl, I think, from the rest of the pack (cited in Seymour, 1991, p. 26)."

Carl Hiaasen has a gift for using biting satire and reporting skills to present readers with issues they should care about. Most of his pieces would not fall under a hard news label, but he employs the same journalistic techniques he used on in-depth investigations to provide information, detail and significance to readers. Influenced by the writers of the New Journalism, and fostered by that talents and status of its editors, *The Miami Herald* newsroom of the 1980s allowed Hiaasen to use literary techniques in daily newspapers writing, both on investigative pieces and later in his columns, to engage readers in stories that might have been glazed over and quickly forgotten if written in a traditional news style.

CHAPTER 5 EDNA BUCHANAN

Bob Swift, a *Herald* columnist who was once Edna's editor at a paper called the *Miami Beach Sun*, told me that he arrived at the *Sun*'s office one day fuming about the fact that somebody had stolen his garbage cans. "I was really mad," he said. "I was saying, 'Who would want to steal two garbage cans!' All of a sudden, I heard Edna say, in that breathless voice, 'Were they empty or full?'" (Trillin, 1986)

Edna Buchanan seems driven by a genuine curiosity to find pertinent details overlooked by most writers. Carl Hiaasen uses his column venue, investigative prowess and satirical humor to shed light on events and issues that impact the people of South Florida. In contrast, Buchanan gave life to the deaths of people who would otherwise be relegated to a paragraph in the obituaries section and then forgotten.

Edna Rydzik Buchanan was born in 1939 in Patterson, New Jersey. Her father walked out on the family when she was seven, and she joined her mother wiring switchboards at the Western Electric plant after finishing high school. Buchanan later transferred to an office job within the company. Accompanying a friend to evening classes at Montclair State Teachers College, Buchanan signed up for a course in creative writing (Trillin, 1986). Everyone in the class already had something published, and Buchanan understandably felt intimidated. Buchanan recalls the second class meeting, when she got back her first assignment about a woman who thought she was being followed:

The next week in class was the turning point in my life. The teacher said, "Something happened to me this week that is the dream of every writing teacher." It took me a while to realize he was talking about my story. I almost fell on the floor. He was so encouraging, and no one had ever encouraged me before. (cited in Finkel, 1985)

Shortly after finishing the course, Buchanan and her mother took a vacation to Miami Beach. Both fell in love with the area and moved permanently within a few months (Trillin, 1986).

After starting her career with the now-defunct *Miami Beach Sun*, Buchanan moved to *The Miami Herald*. She was assigned to the police beat full-time in 1973. As an up-and-coming reporter, Buchanan saw Gene Miller's attention to detail, discipline and creativity lead to his second Pulitzer Prize in 1976 and the acquittal of Wilbert Lee and Freddie Pitts from a wrongful death sentence conviction in 1963. While the police beat serves most reporters as a starting point, Buchanan would continue to cover the crimes, both common and bizarre, of Miami for the remainder of her tenure at the *Herald*.

No other writer of the period at the *Herald* is better known for using literary description for hard-news stories. In "Bank robbers flee after terrorizing customers" from 1985, Buchanan writes:

Two gun-waving stick-up men herded terrified employees, customers and a guard into a washroom Friday and cleaned out a Northwest section bank in broad daylight.

The gunmen escaped, lugging away the loot in trash bags.

The bank robbers wore Metrorail uniforms, said Metro-Dade police and the FBI.

The Village Bank, at 7220 NW 72nd Ave., is across from the huge main storage and maintenance facility for Metrorail.

At 10 a.m. the robbers, clad in the brown trousers and the tan shirts, with the shoulder patch insignia, of Metrorail maintenance workers, walked into the bank. One wore a baseball cap and brandished a nickel-plated revolver. The other gunman's weapon was blue steel. They confronted the guard, marched six employees and two customers into a back washroom and forced them to lie on the floor.

A bank employee, a gun at his head, was forced to open the safe for the robbers, who also emptied the tellers' drawers. They left the coins behind. (Buchanan, 1985a)

Buchanan includes all of the information from a typical crime story but takes it several steps further with fantastic detail and word choice. Readers understand where the event occurred but also the circumstances that led to the robbery – it was pay day for Dade County and the bank “had big bucks on hand (Buchanan, 1985a).” Buchanan was fortunate to have editors like Miller who appreciated subtle details and creative writing that make crime stories fun to read while keeping them factual and informative.

Buchanan also shows panache in sliding colorful description into the flow of information without wasting space. She also throws in a fantastic play on words with minor alliteration, having the robbers move witnesses into a washroom, cleaning out the bank and lugging the loot in trash bags. This piece serves as a perfect example that creative, fun writing and adherence to journalistic ethics are not mutually exclusive. Buchanan says of her eye for detail: “I want to know everything. When the bullet comes through the window, what was on the TV? I always want to know the dog’s name and the cat’s name. I get really curious when I go to the morgue. I want to know all their stories. I’m not sure why (cited in Finkel, 1985).”

And Miami provided Buchanan with a near endless of supply of crime, ranging from the mundane to the bizarre. Buchanan says of Miami’s proclivity for oddity:

Even when Miami was this sleepy resort town that was closed half the year, there was strange and exotic stuff going on. I think it’s because there’s no place left to run for people who come down here to escape something, whether it’s the weather or the law. Maybe that’s why they go crazy around here. Because they find there’s no place left to go. This is the jumping-off point. (cited in Seymour, 1991, p. 28)

Perhaps Buchanan’s most bizarre story came from a 1985 murder:

A naked man carrying the severed head of a woman was found leaning against a Metrorail support at dawn Saturday in a quiet southwest Miami neighborhood.

The man twice hurled the woman’s head at the young police officer who approached him.

“I killed her. She’s the devil!” the man shouted.

“There is no end to the bizarreness of this world,” veteran Miami Homicide Sgt. Mike Gonzalez said later.

“This is something not likely to happen to any policeman again in 100 years.”

Dina Tormos, 18, had been stabbed “many” times with a large hunting type knife, which also was used to cut off her head, police said.

The rest of the murdered woman’s body was found in the suspect’s apartment, several blocks from where he was arrested at Southwest 33rd Avenue and 29th Terrace, just off U.S. 1.

The suspect, Alberto Mesa, 23, was charged with first-degree murder. Hysterical and distraught, he was taken to the prison ward at Jackson Memorial Hospital and sedated. (Buchanan, 1985b)

After covering thousands of murders from the police beat at the *Herald*, Buchanan still wrote with purpose. Many stories, like the above, are quite graphic. If the story only described the death of an 18-year-old female who had been decapitated, a reader wouldn’t take away anything as to the nature of this crime or how it came about. Many editors try to remove details that could horrify readers, but Buchanan believes a successful crime story should cause a man eating breakfast with his wife to “spit out his coffee, clutch his chest and say, ‘My God, Martha! Did you read this!’ (cited in Trillin, 1986)”

Critics may argue that many of the details of a murder do not need to be included to convey the information of the event to readers and that inclusion is purely intended to create sensationalism. Although Buchanan may appear numb or unfeeling to the deaths she writes about, she always took the time to contact the next of kin for a few words about the deceased. Of including a family statement, Buchanan says, “For some people, it’s like catharsis. They want to talk about the kind of person their husband was, or their father. Also, it’s probably the only time his name is going to be in the paper. It’s their last shot. They want to give him a good sendoff (Trillin, 1986).”

Dealing with such graphic violence every day must wear on a person. Buchanan is able to compartmentalize but admits sometimes it catches up to her. Buchanan says:

Every once in a while, I feel burned out, that I'm going to start screaming, that I can't stand one more tragedy. What helps me is to go to the beach and see the ocean and sky. Then I can psych myself out of it. I say to myself, "It's better than working in a coat factory in Paterson, N.J." (cited in Finkel, 1985).

Buchanan's versatility, quality and creativity in covering the police beat won her the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for General News Reporting. She covered the recovery of items from a high-society burglar police had been tracking over four years. Buchanan closes the story by writing, "A crystal box full of seed pearls and tiny turquoise beads must have belonged to somebody's grandmother. A valuable framed miniature of an Indian couple engaged in something from the [Kama] Sutra probably did not (Buchanan, 1985d)." She wrote about a 14- to 16-year-old girl shooting a man in front of a movie theater for talking to her (Buchanan, 1985g) and about a 2-year-old boy wounded in the crossfire of an apartment complex shootout (Buchanan, 1985e).

Her most powerful story from 1985 is "Dad pays last visit to slain daughter."

Buchanan begins:

Handcuffed and weeping, Charles Griffith saw his 3-year-old daughter, Joy, for the last time Sunday.

The brief goodbye at Van Orsdel Funeral Chapel was permitted by order of a Circuit Court judge. Light rain fell and a thunderstorm threatened as armed police and uniformed corrections officers led Griffith into the chapel. Ten minutes later, as the storm broke into a deluge, they took him back to his Dade County Jail cell.

He was crying and saying, "My God, my God, my God."

Griffith, 25, fired two bullets into his little girl's heart as she lay comatose in her crib in the special care nursery at Miami Children's Hospital on Friday night.

Joy had been there since Oct. 23, the day she was irreversibly brain-damaged in a freak accident. As she climbed into a reclining chair to watch cartoons, she was caught by the footrest. It closed on her neck. She was not breathing and had no heartbeat when her mother found her.

Paramedics restored her breathing, but she remained in a coma.

Her ordeal and her short life ended, Joy lay in a tiny coffin Sunday, clad in a pink nightgown. Her father wore the same clothes he had on when he was arrested.

“He’s still confused,” said Griffith’s attorney, Roy Black. “Every time he discusses the case, he breaks up crying. It’s a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions.

Certain that his only child was aware and suffering, Griffith said he could no longer endure her pain.

“I miss her more than anything,” he said Saturday. “Part of my heart is gone, but at the same time, I’m glad she’s at peace. (Buchanan, 1985f)

Police charged Griffith with first-degree murder, using a prior statement that Griffith had said his daughter was better off dead as evidence of premeditation. The judge denied bond but did grant the uncommon request to allow Griffith attend his daughter’s funeral. Buchanan continues:

Before the accident, Joy was a bright and beautiful 2-year-old blond with eyes her father described as “filled with angel dust. Her eyes were blue, with little flecks of light in them,” Griffith said.

By age 2, she spoke both Spanish and English. “Every morning she would say, ‘Gooooood morning, Daddy.’ And I’d say, ‘Joy, why are you so pretty?’ and she’d say, ‘Because I look like my daddy.’”

At his tiny South Beach apartment, the centerpiece, a 10-by-12-inch oil portrait of Joy, is surrounded by hundreds of family photos of the child.

Before going to bed each night, Joy would place her favorite toy dog on her father’s bed, cover it with a blanket and say, “Nighty night.”

“It’s still there, on my bed, with a blanket over it,” Griffith said.

On her third birthday, April 4, Joy was five months into her coma, her father donned clown makeup and took balloons, presents and a birthday cake to her bedside. He held her limp wrist to cut the cake.

On Friday night, in the nursery, he sang *Daddy’s Girl* to her. (Buchanan, 1985f)

The day after Charles Griffith ended his daughter’s life, Buchanan met with a street preacher, one of the few people who knew Griffith. The preacher escorted her to Griffith’s workplace, a porno theater. In the projection booth, 13 photographs of Joy Griffith were taped to the wall. Looking at the pictures, the preacher told Buchanan he was going to visit Griffith in jail. Buchanan gave him her phone number, and asked him

to pass it along. Later that day her phone ring, and Charles Griffith gave Edna Buchanan his story, a story about a horrible accident and the unbearable pain of watching your daughter lie in a coma for five months with little chance of ever making a recovery. Buchanan was the one reporter to get the story, and it ran front page the next day (Finkel, 1985).

Regardless of a reader's personal morality concerning euthanasia, Buchanan certainly makes the father a sympathetic character. And more importantly, she shows the reader Griffith's love for his daughter through his actions instead of relying on a quote, which would struggle to achieve emotional impact. The little girl, Joy, has a personality in this story, even though she was only two years old when the accident occurred.

Conversely to the story of a young girl killed in a tragic accident, Buchanan wrote about a five-year-old boy who could face a murder charge. In "Boy, 5, admits to pushing tot to his death," Buchanan writes:

A smiling 5-year-old boy calmly confessed to police Sunday night that he deliberately pushed a 3-year-old playmate five floors to his death at a Miami Beach bay-front condominium.

The boy's story shocked detectives.

"He doesn't think he did anything wrong," Miami Beach detective Robert Davis said. "He claims that the 3-year-old was complaining that his parents beat him and said he wanted to die – so he obliged.

"He said he pushed him. He watched him fall. He heard him scream when he hit the ground and then he went for help," Davis said. "It's horrendous. He doesn't show any remorse."

Lazaro Gonzalez Jr., a husky 70-pound preschooler, ate two slices of pizza, a garlic roll and a banana after he confessed. (Buchanan, 1986)

Former managing editor Pete Weitzel says that Gene Miller helped push Buchanan into the running for the Pulitzer Prize in 1986. Miller was not only Buchanan's mentor and friend, but as she said at Miller's funeral, the only editor she ever trusted (Weitzel, interview, 2005). Weitzel says of their relationship and her Pulitzer entry:

It's with Gene's help, and rightly so, that Edna was one of the great police reporters in the country. There had been a handful of others, but she certainly was one of the best and deserved some recognition. So the question was what and how. He had a very close, personal relationship with Calvin Trillin. And he talked Calvin into doing a profile in the New Yorker Magazine on Edna. That profile ran in February of the year she won the Pulitzer Prize. There's no question in my mind it had an influence. (Weitzel, interview, 2005).

Trillin's profile of Buchanan certainly put her in the spotlight and would make her name instantly recognizable with Pulitzer judges. Miller knew ahead of time that the profile would be running just before the Pulitzer competition and saw the opportunity to have Buchanan recognized. Weitzel recalls:

Gene came to me and said, "This is the year to submit Edna for the Pulitzer." We helped pull together the entry, select the pieces we submitted [most of which ran during 1985], and I helped him write the letter. So, in fact, he orchestrated the submission and provided that, in knowing that this article that he talked Calvin into writing was going to appear, that this was a good time to do it. And he was right. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

Edna Buchanan, through the support of editors like Gene Miller, was able to tell compelling stories from the police beat that describe the people involved instead of just a profile pulled from the police report. She uses varied sentence structure, cops-and-robbers clichés and descriptions garnered through first-hand observation. Her writing also stands out for recollection of tiny details that would later serve her as a successful mystery novelist. Most of her books involve the heroine Britt Montero, the police-beat reporter for a fictitious Miami newspaper.

CHAPTER 6 GENE MILLER AND NEWSROOM CULTURE

Although Carl Hiaasen, Edna Buchanan and numerous other writers that passed through the doors of *The Miami Herald* were blessed with natural talent, it is undeniable that Gene Miller's tenure at the paper had a tremendous influence on the newsroom culture and the development of young writers. Miller and Pete Weitzel both came to the *Herald* in the 1950s, to a newsroom already focused on innovative and provocative writing. Weitzel recalls:

The paper went out and hired talented people that were ambitious and wanted to grow. I don't think anyone wanted to put hats on people. We wanted to see what we could do and how far we could go and how good we could be. I think that pervaded the newspaper. It was the culture I grew up in journalistically. And it was one that Gene not only grew up in but helped foster. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

The preexisting newsroom culture of intellectual diversity helped Miller get hired despite reservations by some of the staff, including Al Neuharth. Neuharth was the assistant managing editor of the *Herald* at the time and went on to found USA Today, the first national daily newspaper. Miller was hired despite his feisty nature and outspokenness. John McMullen, the city editor, championed Miller. Weitzel says, "Al had been sort of turned off by Gene's brashness at the time. But there was a spirit at the *Herald* that said no, we want those kinds of people. We want those people who will challenge us (Weitzel, interview, 2005)."

Miller challenged himself and other *Herald* staff for 48 years before his death by cancer in 2005. He strived not only to write to the best of his abilities but wanted to see all great stories told in a compelling way to grab readers. Weitzel remembers watching

Miller as a young editor help bring out the best in C.G. Burning, the long-standing courthouse reporter:

He had unbelievable sources, but he couldn't write worth a damn. Literally what happened at five o'clock in the afternoon or so, C.G. would come, sit down, and you'd see him and Gene conferring. If it was an ordinary story, C.G. could write it. But if it was something really good, Gene would kind of debrief it and help him write it or rewrite it. By the time it got to the desk, with sized byline on it, it was a terrific piece of copy. It had been totally Millerized. And he would take no credit for it. But it was a good story, and he wanted a good story to be in the paper. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

Miller helped many young writers tell compelling stories in different ways. He aided Edna Buchanan, his protégé, with her writing and saw her good stories made it through the editorial process and into the newspaper. His position as an editor evolved from being a senior reporter in the newsroom, a de facto editor for young reporters working on special stories, and his love for a great story.

One of Buchanan's most famous articles passed through the desk and into print because of Miller. Weitzel recalls Buchanan's concern that her lead of "Gary Robinson died hungry" would be rewritten at the copy desk:

She had written the lead that way and was afraid it wouldn't clear the desk, and she showed it to Gene and he said he liked it. So, he walked up and said something to the editor on the desk about how Edna has a great story. When she turned it in it just went right on through. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

One of the editors involved later told Weitzel that keeping Edna's lead was heavily debated. To put the decision into context, there recently had been several incidents where unlicensed security guards had drawn weapons and killed people. In "Security guard held for slaying man in restaurant ruckus," Buchanan begins:

Gary Robinson died hungry.

He had a taste for Church's fried chicken. He wanted the three-piece box for \$2.19, plus tax.

Instead he got three bullets – from a security guard who shot him when he ran. Police jailed the guard on a murder charge.

Robinson, 32, walked into Church's, at 2701 NW 54th St., on last Sunday at 11:45 p.m., 15 minutes before closing time. An ex-convict with an extensive arrest record, Robinson lived nearby, at 2905 NW 55th St. (Buchanan, 1985c)

Robinson, who witnesses say was intoxicated, shoved his way to the front of the line, swearing along the way. A young woman behind the counter asked him to wait like all of the other customers. Robinson made his way through line and tried to place an order just before the midnight closing. No more chicken. Offered chicken nuggets as a consolation, Robinson punched the woman in the face and ran out the door. James Derrick Blash, the licensed security guard on duty, and several employees chased Robinson. Buchanan continues:

The guard shouted “quite a few” warnings at Robinson, ordering him to halt, [Detective John Butchko] said. Robinson did not stop running.

“So eventually the guard shot him,” Butchko said. The first shot from the guard’s .38-caliber revolver hit Robinson in the back of the leg, the detective said.

The final shots were fired from about five or six feet away, according to the police. Robinson, critically wounded, was taken to Jackson Memorial Hospital.

“It was probably poor judgment,” Butchko said. “He was just trying to stop the guy.”

Immediately after the shooting, police say the distraught guard anxiously asked several people, “Did I do the right thing?”

“They agreed that he did to make him feel better. He’s a very nice guy,” said Butchko, who arrested him. “He isn’t a bad man, but he committed the crime.”

Blash was initially charged with aggravated battery. Robinson died two days later. The guard, who had been released in his own recognizance, was re-arrested on a second-degree murder charge. He has been denied bond. (Buchanan, 1985c)

On face value, Buchanan had a terrific lead. However, when placed in the context of other similar shootings being talked about within the community, a traditional lead describing a security guard killing a man might be deemed more appropriate. Weitzel says, “I don’t think there’s any questioning that Gene’s coming up and saying he thought it was a great lead convinced them not to change it. No question that his influence had an

effect on it. It was a great lead, and it was a lead that was eventually a [Pulitzer] prize winner (Weitzel, interview, 2005).”

Gene Miller’s love for great stories and the *Herald*’s organizational structure helped the paper cultivate talented writers into award-winning journalists. Weitzel recalls:

Our development of the Neighbors section in the late 70s and 80s, the suburban sections around the greater Miami area allowed [the recruiters] to bring in very young people and train them and develop them in an aggressive reporting mold. All that helped. The paper was growing at the time, and I think that makes a difference. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

Weitzel says he saw these other sections and offices as an opportunity, a training ground to bring along talented writers. The system allowed promotion opportunities within the same organization and allowed the staff to watch young writers develop over time. Weitzel continues:

We began to use that really as a way to, more effectively than we had in the past I think, to reach out and bring in some really good people and use it as a training and development opportunity. Some of the folks who came through the bureau system and the Neighbors system, turned out to be damn good journalists that if we hadn’t had [the system] wouldn’t have had. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

In addition to mentoring young writers, Miller also helped find and bring new talent to the *Herald*. Weitzel, as either the assistant managing editor or deputy managing editor, was placed in charge of intern-recruiting trips. Miller became his regular companion on the trips for the next decade (Weitzel, interview, 2005).

The *Herald* focused not just on recruitment but on having a viable and reasonable progression path for young writers to hone their skills and become great journalists. Without this focus and the positions to allow it to happen, advancement often means moving to another newspaper. Weitzel says that a newspaper not only employs its reporters but should push and educate them:

Management has to allow the people to be creative. You have to allow people to make mistakes. And then you have to try to set up, in the editing process, you try to set up the mechanism so that those mistakes never get in the paper. But you want to push people both from a reporting standpoint and a writing standpoint to do what they can to experiment, to try things, to learn. (Weitzel, interview, 2005)

CHAPTER 7 AFTER THE MERGER

The Miami Herald in the 1980s rose to prominence on the backs of a gifted, talented and dedicated editorial staff. Not only was the *Herald* a fun and educational place to work for young journalists, but industry critics acknowledged the skill employed by bestowing six Pulitzer Prizes on the staff. Six Pulitzers in the 80s marks a significant change in industry stature after receiving a single Pulitzer in each of the previous three decades. Gene Miller, winner of two of the three original *Herald* Pulitzers, was a seasoned veteran of in-depth reporting and investigations that also served as a de facto editor and recruiter for much of the paper's young talent.

Carl Hiaasen and Edna Buchanan are perhaps the two most important young writers groomed by Gene Miller and other seasoned *Herald* staff members. This includes Bill Montalbano, with whom Hiaasen would co-author his first three novels; Pete Weitzel, former managing editor and recruiter; and Jim Savage, leader of the investigations team that Hiaasen was a part of before transitioning to a news columnist. Dave Barry became one of the most famous humor columnists in the country, winning a Pulitzer in 1988, during his career at the *Herald* from 1983 until a hiatus at the end of 2004. More than 90 former *Herald* newsroom staff reporters, photographers and editors were in the newsroom of the *Washington Post* in 2004. There were dozens more at *The New York Times* (Hirsch, interview, 2004).

In 1974, Knight Newspapers, Inc. and Ridder Publications, Inc. merged to become the largest newspaper company in America in terms of total circulation. Both companies

had been publicly traded since the 1960s and had solid stock-value history, but the two had very different perspectives on the role of newspapers. Knight Newspapers had a strong culture of journalism first and a clear separation of the editorial and business sides of a paper. Ridder, on the other hand, was well-regarded for effective business but often indifferent to the content. The merger hoped to blend Knight's journalism and Ridder's business savvy to the benefit of all the encompassed newspapers (Merritt, 2005).

Following the Knight Ridder merger, the corporate mentality originally called for "strengthening the papers journalistically (Merritt, 2005, p. 59)." Although obviously headquartered in the City of Miami, the *Herald* also had state bureaus in Key West, Broward County, Palm Beach and further up the east coast of Florida in Martin County Vero Beach and Cape Canaveral, as well as in the state capital of Tallahassee. Rookie journalists were hired into the Neighbors offices for Dade County, now named Miami-Dade County. Rick Hirsch, who originally came to the *Herald* in 1980 and now serves as Managing Editor for Multimedia and New Projects, uses a baseball analogy to describe the hierarchy of advancement at the paper during the 80s:

At that time, Neighbors was Single-A ball, and then there was the state [bureau] system. So, you'd get hired in the *Herald* and you'd work in the Neighbors sections. And if you were successful after a year or two, you hoped to get promoted to one of the state bureaus. And then going to Miami on the City Desk was really the promise land. (Hirsch, interview, 2004)

Hirsch says the *Herald's* bureau system contributed to the overall talent pool by allowing the paper to develop its own talent by offering young journalists more opportunities to advance within the same organization (Hirsch, interview, 2004). Unfortunately, the bureaus began closing in the late 80s, with the rest shut down in the 90s, as a casualty of profit margin. While the *Herald* staff located throughout the state did quality, local coverage, the advertising revenue gained could not justify the cost of

printing and delivering a paper more than a hundred miles away from the *Herald*. Advertisers in the primary distribution area of the paper did not want to pay for the inflated circulation figures that included many readers out of range and unable to consume the goods and services advertised. This was also true for classified advertisements which were too expensive for residents of the bureau editions to buy, and the majority of listings were for the Miami area and not usable by bureau-area residents (Hirsch, interview, 2004).

After closing the bureaus, the *Herald* lost some of its ability to retain young talent because the options for upward mobility were decreasing. Although this paper does not focus on the newsroom structure and change, it seems logical that fewer opportunities to advance vertically within the *Herald* caused many talented, young journalists to leave for larger papers, including the *Washington Post* and the *Times*, before attaining journalistic prominence. Cal Fussman, an alumnus of the *Herald* bureau system and current writer for *Esquire*, says, “No other newspaper in the country had so many great people leave (Fussman, interview, 2004).”

David Lawrence, Jr. served as the publisher of the *Herald* from 1989 to 1999, steering the ship through a decade that saw massive media consolidation and a stronger industry focus on profit margins and the value of stock in publicly traded newspaper companies. Lawrence says, “By the time I reached the *Herald* in 1989, there already were significant indicators of a much tougher competitive and economic climate. Having said that, the paper remained quite profitable and, in fact, remains so” (Lawrence, interview, 2005).

Lawrence rose through the Knight Newspapers chain as a reporter and editor before being hired as the managing editor of the *Philadelphia Daily News* in 1971. He moved to *The Charlotte Observer* as editor following the Knight Ridder merger. Before coming to Miami, he had served as the publisher of the *Detroit Free Press*. Lawrence was in the minority of publishers who were trained as journalists, not through the business side of newspapers (Merritt, 2005, p. 186). Arriving at the *Herald*, Lawrence understood the needs of the newsroom and the non-traditional writing techniques, including the Miller Chop, many staff writers incorporated in daily newspaper writings. Lawrence describes his outlook concerning literary news writing:

Like most in newspaper journalism, I learned the inverted pyramid way of doing things as a young reporter and the crucial nature of who, what, when, where, why and how. Those lessons serve well in any form of journalism. But story-telling is crucial and there are some stories that ought to be told in other, more compelling ways. What we sought to do is give readers the facts and context so they could make up their own minds in this democracy, but we also sought to tell these stories in different ways. We thought we had not only the obligation to tell readers and citizens the problems of society but also some potential solutions they could ponder and then decide for themselves. Reporters must begin with the basics; the more seasoned reporters will be able to try other writing styles effectively. It is all about reaching the reader. (Lawrence, interview, 2005)

Davis Merritt, in his book *Knightfall* (Merritt, 2005), describes his first-hand account of the marriage between Knight Newspapers tradition of quality journalism with Ridder Publications' business savvy. Traditional ethos of newspaper journalism as serving the public good was the casualty to serving the business interests of Wall Street and stock owners. In a 2004 letter to Merritt, Lawrence recalls becoming uneasy in 1995 in regards to economic pressures that already existed but were increasing. Lawrence writes:

But until the mid-nineties, the company was, I believe, quite successful in achieving a balance between business and news. That balancing act was clear in the decisions over the years to pair a CEO with someone of different emphasis, Lee

Hills, Jim Batten, and so forth. Only in recent years have the two most visible people in the company been businesspeople – and not journalists.... The business ethos became the paramount driver from the mid-nineties on. The balance is gone. (cited in Merritt, 2005, p. 187)

Merritt details and criticizes what he sees as a fundamental shift in the outlook of newspaper owners. Instead of newspapers being an important business for the public good that also can be quite profitable, the business of newspapers is being undertaken as a good way to make money, which Merritt sees as no different than manufacturing coat hangers. Marketability and competition dictate what level of quality yields the highest rate of return (Merritt, 2005, pp. 14-15). In a business that innately brings high profits, constant demand for increasing profits make it difficult to maintain a newsroom staff capable of creating quality journalism. Lawrence recalls demands from corporate leadership:

It was a constant tussle. I respected the need to make a profit, though I might disagree with corporate as to how profitable we needed to be, because that profit pays for the good journalism and keeps one free. But I cannot deny the constant pressure of a big public company, with big appetites for profits, frequently colliding with my own appetite for enough space and staff to do the journalism mission well. (Lawrence, interview, 2005)

Lawrence says constant, destructive pressures to make cuts in order to meet increasing profit-margin goals were not directed and created an unhealthy, “permanently unsettled staff.” In 1998, Lawrence says, “I was being asked to get to 25 percent [operating return] over three years, and that would have meant cutting 185 positions. I just couldn’t do this cutting any more and live with myself” (cited in Merritt, 2005, p. 187). Lawrence resigned.

Near the time of his resignation, there was talk that Lawrence might run to be governor of Florida. According to Pete Weitzel, Lawrence was near his breaking point at the *Herald* when the talk began. Lawrence perhaps was flattered by the notion and didn’t

turn down the idea at first mention, something the publisher of a newspaper should do because of the tremendous conflict of interests between political aspirations and newspaper management. Although Lawrence's delayed refusal of running was inappropriate for a publisher, it had nothing to do with his imminent resignation (Weitzel, interview, 2005).

In 2002, Hiaasen released *Basket Case*, his first novel told as a first-person narrative and also his first novel to feature a journalist as the lead character (Hiaasen, 2002a). Hiaasen's main character, Jack Tagger, was once an investigative reporter before embarrassing the "soulless, profit-hungry owner of the newspaper" at a stockholders' meeting (Hiaasen, website, 2002b). Throughout the book, Hiaasen opines the nature of journalism and what it has become through the manipulation of the business side of news organizations. Hiaasen's advice to the corporate leadership of newspapers:

Don't step foot in a newsroom, don't send any memos to a newsroom. Fight over the budget but don't pretend to know anything about journalism. They know nothing about journalism. They know what their shareholdings are at any given hour. Today's newspapers are edited for Wall Street, for the stockholders. They're not edited for readers. They're edited to get the maximum profit out of them, not to deliver the maximum amount of essential information to a community or neighborhood. That's the last thing they're interested in doing because that's what costs the most money.

You have to get the little vermin in the suits back on the country club. Get them out on the golf course and keep them away from the newsroom. That's the first thing you have to do, and that's not going to be any easy thing to do. But if they were interested in making newspapers more interesting and therefore different from what everyone else is doing, and a better product in their work, then they would just start to leave the newsrooms alone and let the editors and reporters decide what's best for those communities and to take some chances and to do some creative things. That's a very tough thing.

They don't want to leave their hands off. The money is too important now that the newspaper business is in such trouble that they're becoming more meddlesome instead of less meddlesome. There used to be a very distinct and unbreachable barrier between the business side of journalism and the journalistic side of journalism.

When I was in that newsroom in the Herald starting out, I couldn't tell you what the stock price was, and I couldn't tell you what our monthly circulation figures were. I couldn't tell you whether we were above budget or below budget or what the profit margin of Knight Ridder was going to be for the coming year. All of that information in not only polluting the newsroom now, it's being shoved into the faces of most reporters and editors. We're not making budget, we're not making projections, we're not making the numbers. And ever since that's happened, numbers are falling.

Every experiment that has ever been done where you burden the journalist with this kind of information has backfired economically for these corporations. They haven't figured it out yet. And they won't until it's too late I'm sure. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005)

Hiaasen thinks for newspapers to have a chance at survival competing with the Internet and television news, newspapers must focus on depth reporting requiring a literary style of writing (Hiaasen, interview, 2005). Communication and delivery technologies fundamentally have changed the nature of newspapers. Newspapers now will rarely be in a position to break spot news stories. A 24-hour news channel or a blog or an electronic wire service broke it hours ago. Newsrooms still have a distinct advantage over other media outlets in terms of information gathering. Newspapers should no longer be concerned with breaking news. Instead, reporters and editors should play to their strengths to create in-depth pieces relaying the context and significance of issues and news events to its readers.

Newspapers are not traditional businesses and should not be run as businesses with profit serving as the overriding indicator of success. Demand for profit margin creates cutbacks. Small staff size reduces the breadth and depth of news coverage. Consumers receive news faster and cheaper through television and Internet news sources. If newspaper coverage is stripped down to merely detailing events and horse race political coverage, no new information will arrive on a consumer's lawn that has not been broadcast or released through more immediate mediums. Hiaasen concludes:

You go back to your numbers and you go back to your salesman, and you sell a lot more ads. We'll put a lot more good stuff in the paper. We'll put stuff in the paper that readers can't get anywhere else and you'll sell some newspapers. But they don't want to do that. They just want to recycle, and they're paying a big price. (Hiaasen, interview, 2005).

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examined *The Miami Herald* as an established newspaper that employed literary writing styles and elements in daily newspaper writing. The 1980s originally was selected as the primary focus of this case study because this was the decade when Carl Hiaasen, Edna Buchanan and Dave Barry rose to fame both within the industry and with readers around the nation. As I conducted interviews and analyzed texts, this time period became more important not just to the *Herald* as an individual newspaper but also for insight as to ingredients that can create a healthy, capable and award-winning newsroom as well as cause the quality of journalism to fall.

Literary writing in newspapers can be traced back to Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain, and the staff of the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* in the 1860s. Although criticized at the time, literary elements and first-person narrative would become commonplace in news writing toward the end of the century, culminating in the battle between Hearst and Pulitzer. The Yellow Journalism that allegedly started the Spanish-American War was abandoned during the first World War in favor of strict objectivity. Fueled by the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and later Watergate, journalism had renewed purpose. The New Journalism of New York during the 1960s and 70s used literary techniques and different narrative styles to seek and report truth to readers. Although literary journalism of the time, and the New Journalism in particular, was used almost entirely in magazine writing, the work of Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, Gay

Talese, *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone* and others from this period influenced a generation of journalists.

Gene Miller came to the *Herald* in 1957 and honed his investigative and writing abilities to win Pulitzer Prizes in 1967 and 1976. Having received two of the three Pulitzers in the history of the *Herald* to that point, Miller had creative freedom from most editorial control. Buchanan and Hiaasen, while being born with writing talent, were fortunate to have a mentor that had a history with the *Herald* and was virtually free from the criticism of most editors. Miller served as a de facto editor and not only allowed but encouraged creative writing, while still maintaining a strict stance on getting the facts straight and incorporating details to inform the reader. Pete Weitzel shared Miller's emphasis on creativity. As managing editor, Weitzel could have put the brakes on literary writing if he had chosen to. Hiaasen and Buchanan honed their researching and investigation skills while being pushed to tell compelling stories because they did not have to write for bad, self-conscious editors. Good editors can accept when reporters write better than themselves and still push the reporters to excel. Bad editors are intimidated by good writing, especially when a literary theme is used, and want to be given copy that sticks to facts without color or style.

In addition to established, quality editors, the *Herald* also had an organizational structure that allowed young talent to advance through its bureau system instead of having to leave for another paper in order to receive a promotion. Unfortunately, business concerns led to the deconstruction of the bureau system by the mid 1990s, making it harder for young staff to stay at the *Herald* and hone their craft by working with a consistent team of editors for many years.

The fast climb in stature and industry recognition of *The Miami Herald*, including a record six Pulitzers during the 1980s, stalled and receded during the late 1990s amid corporate pressure for higher profit margins. Journalism, and newspaper journalism in particular, is not a traditional business. Simply put, the profit margin in creating a product is a balancing act between the cost of creating the product, the level of quality desired in the product and the price the consumer is willing to pay for the product. A traditional business model should not be applied to running a newspaper company because the quality of information and how that information can create a more informed citizenry should override the desire to maximize profits.

For a business to exist, it must make a profit. And this certainly holds true for newspapers. However, newspapers have among the highest profit margins of any industry. Knight Ridder newspapers received 38 Pulitzer Prizes from 1980 to 1993, including three Gold Medals for Public Service with profits in the low teens. As operating return rose to more than 20 percent from 1994 to 2003, Knight Ridder only received nine Pulitzers (Merritt, 2005, p. 165). As focus on profit increased, the quality of journalism decreased, using the number of Pulitzers as an indicator of quality. Knight Ridder newspapers went from receiving almost three Pulitzers a year to less than one. While earning a profit is essential to running a business, acceptable margins in newspapers should be balanced with doing quality journalism and informing the public and not driven by the price of a publicly traded stock.

Newspapers no longer serve as a primary source for information consumers. Both Internet news sites and television news channels are faster and allow for better visuals. Newspapers continue to have, despite staff reductions, a marketable advantage for

providing in-depth reporting, context and significance to the public. With circulation figures consistently falling, newspapers should be playing to the strengths of the medium instead of cutting costs and trying to duplicate other news sources with little chance of breaking superficial stories.

The Miami Herald in the 1980s stands apart as a newspaper having editors that motivated and encouraged, quality reporters who told compelling stories, and an organizational culture that recognized the quality of journalism as the primary indicator of a successful newspaper. Other newspapers during this time period may have had common elements and undergone similar business transitions to the *Herald*. However, the *Herald* situation is unique in that the paper had such a dramatic increase in industry prestige and award recognition in such a short time.

Although this thesis examines the relationship between a particular group of writers and editors, further research should examine the role of editor as motivator and mentor. The process of editing is essential to create a compelling finished process. The attitudes and styles of editors could be found to be nearly as influential in the writing styles used as the creativity of the writers themselves.

Media consolidation, and the resulting profit-driven corporate leadership, makes it doubtful to see a time when quality and public service will be the primary focus of newspaper companies.

Because this thesis examined factors related to *The Miami Herald*, the findings and my resulting qualitative theory as to why the *Herald* rose to prominence should not be taken as a generalizable formula for success. Tracking the quality of journalism for this specific newspaper was based almost entirely on the number of Pulitzer Prizes awarded.

While Pulitzers do serve as an accepted indicator of quality in journalism, further research needs to be conducted. Quality is subjective and therefore usually relegated to qualitative research. Research quantifying quality and relating a quality indicator to profit margin could help determine an optimal operating return for newspapers. While this quality indicator might be difficult to create due to many variables, it could help newspapers do unique and informative journalism while still making newspapers profitable enough to satisfy corporate and business interests.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Duwe Stanton was born in Stuart, Florida. During his sophomore year at the University of Florida, he changed his major from mechanical engineering to journalism. As an undergraduate, he worked or interned in newspaper writing, editing, photography, magazines and corporate communications. He focused his graduate work in media convergence and online news/content production as a teaching assistant to David Carlson, director of the Interactive Media Lab. He will begin his doctoral work at the University of Florida upon graduation.