



Writer's Block

The Voice Of A Community

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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VERMILLION — *Grand Forks Herald* columnist Marilyn Hagerty went viral last March for her review of the North Dakota city's first Olive Garden restaurant. Then, the stunned 86-year-old writer had to call her son — a *Wall Street Journal* reporter — and ask what "viral" meant and if it was a good thing. Hagerty had offered a straightforward review of the local Olive Garden's decor, service and its "warm and comforting" chicken Alfredo. Within moments after the column was posted online, Hagerty had become an Internet sensation. The column has surpassed one million website hits, drawing both the praise and ire of complete strangers. She received invitations for national television appearances and ate at some of New York's top restaurants. She even struck up a friendship with chef, author and television personality Anthony Bourdain, initially one of her biggest critics.

But while the world will remember Hagerty for her Olive Garden review, Grand Forks residents also know her as a voice of hope during some of the city's darkest days. Hagerty joined other Grand Forks residents displaced during the Red River flood of 1997. The newspaper not only covered the disaster but fell victim to it. The *Herald* building flooded and caught on fire at the same time — leading to the bizarre view of soaring flames in the midst of inundation. Despite its displacement, the paper continued operating and didn't miss a day of publication. The *Herald* became a unifying force for a devastated city whose residents were scattered to a number of locations.

In the midst of the despair, Hagerty continued her columns. Surrounded by hopelessness, she provide hope for Grand Forks' 50,000 residents. She shared their pain, herself leaving behind her home and seeking some sense of normalcy. Fifteen years later, she recalled those moments for the *Press & Dakotan*. She returned last week to her alma mater, the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, to accept the Al Neuharth Award for Excellence in the Media.

During an exclusive interview with the *Press & Dakotan*, she described those months in 1997 when Grand Forks saw its worst moments but also the best in its people. For its coverage and its efforts at holding together the community, the *Herald* received the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. During last week's interview, Hagerty quickly dismissed herself as part of the Pulitzer Prize-winning effort. The award was meant for the other staff members who covered the hard news and kept the newspaper going, she said.

Her editor at the time apparently saw her playing a much bigger role. "During the flood, the whole town (of Grand Forks) was evacuated. Our homes were under water," Hagerty said. "We all left, and I went to Bismarck (to stay with family)." Hagerty had begun working at the *Herald* as a feature writer in 1961. She officially "retired" in 1991, but she was still writing five columns a week, including her "Eat-beat" food column.



Randy DOCKENDORF

The *Herald* editor at the time didn't want to lose Hagerty's connection with readers at such a dire time as the flooding. Hagerty represented a sense of community when no community existed, at least physically, for the most part. "My editor contacted me in Bismarck and wanted me to return to writing, to resume my columns," Hagerty said. "I asked, 'Why? You have writers from all over the country, even from *TIME* magazine, in Grand Forks covering the story.'" That was the point, the editor said. Readers needed a personal connection — a familiar face, a reassuring voice. "I was told, 'You live here. You know the people. Your house is under water, just like them. You know what they're going through,'" Hagerty recalled, as if hearing the editor's call once again. Those were not easy times for Hagerty or her family. She was displaced half-way across the state, dealing with her flood-ravaged home and other personal challenges back in Grand Forks. She was separated from colleagues, friends and the community and readership that had embraced her.

In many ways, Hagerty's columns became therapeutic, both for herself and her readers during the ravages of flooding. She wrote of their common struggles and their hopes. And, most importantly, she wrote of their determination to return to their homes and to rebuild their community once the floodwaters receded. The act of producing her columns, and putting out the paper each day at temporary sites for more than a year, became a sort of lifeline. "The pages were put together in Manvel, a little town about 8 or 10 miles from Grand Forks," she said. "We were a (Knight-Ridder) paper back then, so the pages were flown to St. Paul (Minn.) each day. The paper was printed, then flown back to Grand Forks and dropped at places on each side of the Red River. They were also delivering copies to Fargo and all over, wherever people from Grand Forks were now living."

"And we didn't miss an issue. We never missed a beat," she added, flashing a smile that revealed a moment of pride and satisfaction. Hagerty's mother-in-law warned her there wasn't much money to be made in a newspaper career. Hagerty replied that she has measured success in the joy she has brought others. In fact, she showed a puzzled look when asked how she still cranks out five columns a week. "It's my work, but it's not really work," she said. "It's my pleasure, my way of life."

Thanks to the frenzy surrounding her Olive Garden review, that "way of life" now includes appearances on "Piers Morgan Tonight," "Today," and "The Early Show," along with syndicated talk show host Anderson Cooper. By the way, she and Bourdain have become friendly to the point where she calls him "Tony." "It's like a wild dream that never ends," she said of her newfound stardom. "If you tried to plan something like this, it would never happen."

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at [twitter.com/RDockendorf](#)

Debates: A 2-Party Stranglehold

BY LANE FILLER
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As the presidential election approaches, the emails in my in-box can be divided into three basically equal categories: (1) "I cannot believe you have fallen for Obolagna's trix." (2) "How cum U cant see thru Mitwit Romney's dum republikkan dumness." (3) "Have you heard how Gary Johnson, the Libertarian Party candidate for president, is getting rolled?" The first two categories I answer quickly and politely, because they are mostly from family. The Gary Johnson stuff I've just been chewing on, though, and getting disgusted.

We are a two-party system — not by law, but because the Democrats and the Republicans have seized the mechanisms of government. They use their control to maintain power, and other parties can't compete. This causes a bunch of self-perpetuating, corrosive behaviors, like government-funded primaries for these major parties, which are really nothing but private organizations. Withholding the money for a Republican primary out of a libertarian's paycheck makes as much sense as taxing Jews to pay for KKK dance parties (now that's an idea for a reality show). Another, more pressing way the Republicans and Democrats control the process came about in the late 1980s when the two major parties created the "nonpartisan" Commission on Presidential Debates, and crowded out the League of Women Voters, which had run the general election debates up until then. In 1988, the League withdrew, saying in a statement that "the demands of the two campaign organizations would perpetrate a fraud on the American voter." The League was right. The debates have largely been unfair and prepackaged since then, and the Commission on Presidential Debates is currently run by a former head of the Republican National Committee and a former White House press secretary (under Bill Clinton). And no one from any other party need apply.

We now have an estimated 90 million "unlikely voters." These are citizens eligible to cast a ballot, who likely won't bother. They say their vote won't matter, that there's nothing worth voting for. Interestingly, about 20 percent say they would vote for a third-party candidate if they did bother to cast a ballot, and 53 percent say third-parties are needed. In a phone interview, Johnson, the former New Mexico governor who's heading the Libertarian Party ticket, told a miserable tale. He tried to run for president as a Republican this time, and was barred from most of the debates, even though, he says, he had the 4 percent support in a national poll needed to qualify. "How would you feel about that," he asked, a bit plaintively. "What if it were you?" Then he accepted the Libertarian Party nomination, and he can't get a lectern in the three general election debates, where the requirement is 15 percent support in a major poll. He's suing the Commission on Presidential Debates, but is unlikely to win in court. Regardless, he believes he's polling at 6 percent nationally — and higher in many states — and what he draws could decide the race in a few of them, Ralph Nader-2000 style. Few would want every lunatic who says he's running for president on the stage. But it would be good to have more debates, and to hear from more than the two big brands. What if every candidate on the ballot in at least half the states got to participate in a debate or two, and standards toughened for later forums. It feels like "the establishment" — the corporations and power players — don't care which of the two major candidates wins. They just want to be sure a Ron Paul, a Gary Johnson, a Dennis Kucinich and a Ralph Nader can't win, or, really, that their often unconventional ideas can't be heard. And until enough people make noise about it, inside the voting booth and out, it won't change.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Beware Of The Farm Bill 'Cop-Out'

KEARNEY (Neb.) HUB (Oct. 5): Don't allow federal lawmakers to shrug off their inability to pass the 2012 Farm Bill by claiming their inaction before recessing for the campaign season won't affect very many Americans. That's a cop-out. The U.S. Senate and House Ag Committee both passed their versions of the farm bill, but the full House of Representatives did not take up the legislation before the election recess. Lacking a vote in the full House, the farm bill expired Sept. 29. Farmers who need to finance their planting for next year may face problems completing that process because neither they nor their lenders will know exactly what to expect when Congress revisits the farm bill after the November elections. Also waiting with concern are farmers who depend upon federal programs to boost foreign trade, fight soil erosion and help dairy operations. Dairy farmers have uncertainty because the Milk Income Loss Contract program has expired. ... The USDA's Foreign Market Development Program is a cost-sharing trade promotion partnership with agricultural producers and processors, but its funding will run out later in October. ... Thirty-one percent of U.S. gross farm income comes from exports, which also help to counter our nation's trade imbalance. Finally, there will be no new signups in the Conservation Reserve Program. About 6.5 million acres are enrolled in CRP, a voluntary land retirement program that helps ag producers fight erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and safeguard ground and surface water. In addition to CRP, signups have ceased for wetlands and grasslands reserve programs. ... It seems unlikely that the same legislators who dropped the ball before the election will be of much use to America's farmers after the election.

OUR LETTER POLICY

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed. ■ Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind. ■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses. ■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue. ■ Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to [views@yankton.net](#).

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Thursday, Oct. 11, the 285th day of 2012. There are 81 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Oct. 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII convened the first session of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, also known as "Vatican 2."

On this date: In 1779, Polish nobleman Casimir Pulaski, fighting for American independence, died two days after being wounded during the Revolutionary War Battle of Savannah, Ga.

In 1811, the first steam-powered ferryboat, the *Juliana* (built by John Stevens), was put into operation between New York City and Hoboken, N.J.

In 1862, during the Civil War, Confederate forces led by Gen. J.E.B. Stuart looted the town of Chambersburg, Pa.

In 1890, the Daughters of the American Revolution was founded in Washington, D.C.

In 1910, Theodore Roosevelt became the first former U.S. president to fly in an airplane during a visit to St. Louis, Mo.

In 1932, the first American political telecast took place as the Democratic National Committee sponsored a program from a CBS television studio in New York.

In 1942, the World War II Battle of Cape Esperance began in the Solomon Islands, resulting in an American victory over the Japanese.

In 1958, the lunar probe Pioneer 1 was launched; it failed to go as far out as planned, fell back to Earth, and burned up in the atmosphere.

In 1968, Apollo 7, the first manned Apollo mission, was launched with astronauts Wally Schirra, Donn Fulton Eisele and R. Walter Cunningham aboard. The government of Panama was overthrown in a military coup.

In 1984, space shuttle Challenger astronaut Kathryn Sullivan became the first American woman to walk in space.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev opened two days of talks concerning arms control and human rights in Reykjavik, Iceland.

In 1992, in the first of three presidential debates, three candidates faced off against each other in St. Louis, Mo. — President George H.W. Bush, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton and businessman Ross Perot.

Ten years ago: The Senate joined the House in approving, 77-23, use of America's military might against Iraq. Former President Jimmy Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize. A man was shot to death at a gas station near Fredericksburg, Va., in the latest slaying by the Washington-area sniper. A chain reaction crash on a foggy

interstate near Cedar Grove, Wis., killed ten people and injured 40 others. A teenager set off a homemade bomb inside a crowded mall in Vantaa, Finland, killing himself and six others.

Five years ago: The Bush administration reported that the federal budget deficit had fallen to \$162.8 billion in the just-completed budget year, the lowest amount of red ink in five years. Cold medicines for babies and toddlers were pulled off shelves amid concerns about unintentional overdoses. Briton Doris Lessing won the 2007 Nobel Prize in literature. Werner von Trapp, a member of the musical family made famous by the musical "The Sound of Music," died in Waitsfield, Vt., at age 91.

One year ago: Presidential challenger Mitt Romney accused President Barack Obama of failing to lead in a time of economic peril but sounded less conservative than his Republican rivals in their debate in Hanover, N.H., defending the 2008-2009 Wall Street bailout and declaring he could work with "good" Democrats. U.S. officials accused agents of the Iranian government of plotting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. The U.S. women rolled to their third title at the world gymnastics championships held in Tokyo. The Detroit Tigers won their first game of the 2011 AL championship series, sweeping past the Texas Rangers 5-2 in Game 3.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elmore Leonard is 87. Actor Earle Hyman is 86. Former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry is 85. Actor Ron Leibman is 75. Actor Amitabh Bachchan is 70. Country singer Gene Watson is 69. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., is 62. Rhythm-and-blues musician Andrew Woolfolk is 62. Actress-director Catlin Adams is 62. Country singer Paulette Carlson is 61. Actor David Morse is 59. Actor Stephen Spinella is 56. Pro Football Hall of Famer Steve Young is 51. Actress Joan Cusack is 50. Rock musician Scott Johnson (Gin Blossoms) is 50. Comedy writer and TV host Michael J. Nelson is 48. Actor Sean Patrick Flanery is 47. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL player Chris Spielman is 47. Actor Luke Perry is 46. Country singer-songwriter Todd Snider is 46. Actor-comedian Artie Lange is 45. Actress Jane Krakowski is 44. Rapper U-God (Wu-Tang Clan) is 42. Rapper MC Lyte is 41. Figure skater Kyoko Ina is 40. Singer NeeNa Lee is 37. Actress Emily Deschanel is 36. Actor Matt Bomer is 35. Actor Trevor Donovan is 34. Actress Michelle Trachtenberg is 27. Golfer Michelle Wie is 23.

Thought for Today: "When a friend speaks to me, whatever he says is interesting." — Jean Renoir, French movie director (1894-1979).

FROM THE BIBLE

[The Lord says,] "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides Me there is no God; I equip you." Isaiah 45:5. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

The End Result

Fred Bender, Yankton
Regarding Kelly Hertz's column on the 11th anniversary of the start of our war with Afghanistan (*Press & Dakotan*, Oct. 5), I would add that this is the 20th Afghan war in modern history. Some have resulted in occupation of that country or region. Others have failed to get that far. Most of the wars have been

with neighbors: India, Iran, Russia, etc. England (three times) and the United States (one time so far) have been the most geographically distant countries to engage in war with Afghanistan. There is good and bad news if you can imagine our country in a similar position: it always has gone back to being Afghanistan. For better and for worse.

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