

ASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

Mocha Musings: Truth will out

By Susanne Severeid

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Truth: Defined in Webster's Dictionary as "the real facts about something: the things that are true: the quality or state of being true: a statement or idea that is true or accepted as true."

The concept of truth is an important one, and I would wager (even though I'm not a betting woman) that we all consider it as such. But here is where it gets tricky: how do we determine what the "real facts" are so that we can then determine something to be "true"? On what do we base our final judgment of what is, or is not, true?

In the 1940s and 1950s, Americans had the likes of Edward R. Murrow and Eric Severeid to report the truth. These men knew the validity of what they were reporting because they had been there, in the theater of conflict in Europe, for instance, during WWII. They were not chosen for their camera-pretty faces; they were tough, seasoned journalists who wrote their own copy and who knew of that which they spoke. CLOSE X

When I was growing up, it was Walter Cronkite's trusted visage that guided our nation through the horrors and lies of the Vietnam War and, as a child, I remember watching Mr. Cronkite remove his glasses to wipe the tears from his eyes as he reported that President Kennedy was dead. These men (and it was almost entirely men in those days) helped us to make sense of our daily dose of news, and we had no reason to doubt them.

Every town used to have its own newspaper, too, remember? And it didn't look like an excuse for advertisements or an insert. It was a real newspaper, with an editor and a local office you could walk into if you wanted to speak with someone. They had reporters with years of experience in their towns who wrote with authority and affection and knew all the "players," the politicians, and the behind-the-scenes shenanigans.

They wrote about everything from blue ribbons at the county fair to corrupt officials leaving town in the middle of the night. Local papers had not yet become Monopoly pieces owned by mega-corporations or mouthpieces for rightwing outlets. In major cities, it was commonplace to have more than one paper, often with differing points of view.

The larger papers also had the time and budget for investigative pieces where resolute reporters were encouraged to “scoop” stories and sniff out scandal and corruption. I remember journalists like Jimmy Breslin, David Brinkley, Margaret Bourke-White, Seymour Hersh and Bill Moyers, just to name a few.

The sad truth is that we have lost much in recent times with the move away from independently owned and managed presses to the corporatizing of our media outlets. Without such “vehicles” for free speech and genuine opportunities for differences of opinion, and the chance to go in-depth on important issues and reporters with the “chops” to do it, we are left with one-sided copy, where, sadly, the word count is often top-heavy in favor of the powers-that-be. Without an equal opportunity for the voices of the people and those who dare to challenge those in control, there can be no way of verifying the truth in an issue.

With neither access to information and facts nor opportunities to rebut, we are left with bombastic statements like: “Citizens of Ashland, hear me out!” Seriously? When those in positions of power are allowed to make accusations that go unchallenged and remain unsupported by evidence or facts, it leaves the rest of us to fill in public comment cards at poorly advertised council and commissioners’ meetings.

After Murrow’s death, his colleague and friend Eric Sevareid said, “He was a shooting star; and we will live in his afterglow a very long time.”

I look for even a small shaft of his afterglow, for it seems to me to be a dark time. I can only hope that, right now, in Ashland, Shakespeare will be proven right and, “Truth will out.”

— *Author, TV presenter and world traveler Susanne Severeid is an Ashland resident who enjoys making time for the important things in life — including modha. Read more of her columns at bit.ly/adtssmm. For more, go to*

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