



Professor Reed thanks approximately 200 students, alumni and friends at his journalism recognition dinner held in April, 2004 in Charleston, Illinois.

EASTERN ILLINOIS SPECIAL EDITION

*It Can't Be Rock N Roll
Unless It is Heard*

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J-ALUMS RETURN TO EIU MOTHERSHIP



OLD WAYS DIE HARD

There was short breathing time on the Day after Tax Day. The office manager did not want me to leave work early, but since she was only 5 years old, her final concerns were vetoed by staff.

Rush hour Friday is not the time to head south through the

suburban expressway concrete maze. After topping off the tank with \$2.03 87 octane, the five hour transit to Charleston began by heading south on Route 53/I-355. It was more of a mall parking lot than a highway. It seemed like all five million citizens

Continued on Page 6

CHARLESTON, IL -- (4/04)--Even neo-journalists have a genetic root stock. My journalism branch traces itself back to the late 1970s at Eastern Illinois University. At the time, EIU was a small state university in the prairie cornfields south of Champaign-Urbana.

The journalism department had moved its operations to the Student Services Building. The concept of journalism at EIU had a nomadic existence, bouncing from building to building. But the department had stabilized and grown under the

chairman Dan Thornburg.

David Reed was the faculty advisor to student publications. As a Journalism 101 professor, one of the first sentences he would tell a student was "go downstairs and work at the News."

The Eastern News was the campus newspaper. It was staffed and edited by students through the mentoring by the faculty.

Last fall, it was announced that Reed would be retiring this summer. In the past few

Continued on Page 2

Return to the Mothership

months, a series of alumni emails wandered around class call lists. There was to be an appreciation dinner for Reed.

Initially, the organizers were needing about 50 paying guests for the Saturday night banquet hall. However, the turnout was larger than most expected; nearly 200 people showed up to salute Reed. It was a greater turnout than a normal homecoming, when a few alums from the various (four-year) class eras show up on campus in the fall to blitz the old haunts and catch-up on class news.

But this event would be different. This would truly mark an end of an era in the journalism department. Reed thanked Thornburg was his building up the department and teaching him how to become a great teacher. The current faculty thanked Reed for his leadership and guidance in all departmental affairs. The students thanked Reed for being himself.

One of the cornerstone elements of EIU has been that people were never computer student ID numbers in nameless lecture halls being force fed professor notes by grad assistants. Also, age appeared not to matter. Students were not pigeonholed by class rank; the terms freshman, sophomore or senior did not infer any distinctions. Only ability, desire, and work ethic mattered to people. Everyone was on a first name basis. The formal in-

formality lead to stronger bonds between college students and their professors.

At EIU, there was an open door policy of access to students. When you do not close the communication lines after an 8 hour day, students appreciated the involvement. When you graduated, Reed kept in touch with everyone he could in order bridge classes and securely mortar the journalism department family members together, whether they stayed in the profession or sidetracked into other careers.

This publication began as a form letter that was sent to friends who had graduated a year before I did. One of our commandments was not to print any libelous material. Our solution was to put any goofy material, blown headlines, and sick satire on a filing cabinet located next to the copy desk. Over time, I thought that this is where the Real News was; so I kept recent grads up-to-date on what was going on. After graduation, the form letter continued to be written and postal regulations bent to its legal limits. It outgrew its form letter format quickly into a zine before the concept of a zine hit the mainstream media. But the demand continues, so was the push to go electronic. This is the classic case of a snowball (a simple form letter to friends) rolling into an avalanche (three web sites).

There was also the two annual homecoming events that the department had each year. But as the years piled on, it became more difficult to plan ahead to guarantee attendance.

The event itself only crystallized in February. Two months is not a long time to plan an event. So the expectations were for a low turnout for the retirement event. There were so many people in attendance, the only downside of the event was there was not enough time to talk to everyone you knew.

When I arrived at 6 p.m., I met Reed in the parking lot. He seemed in great spirits, as usual. When could not get into the front door without being greeted by an endless stream of alums pouring out of their hotel rooms. When we got to the banquet room, the sign-in line had the feel of an expressway at rush hour. So a few of us bypassed the formality of checking-in for a the cash-bar line instead. Then we gathered just off the front door in sniper mode to see who would show up next. Someone said people were signing up others to give speeches. So we avoided the matter to reserve a table for our core group, but that suddenly turned into about 2 1/2 tables. After dinner, the program started with speeches and stories.

Like the army, one does not volunteer to give a public speech, but if called upon to serve this is what I would have said:

THE SPEECH

Last February, I was walking south down Rush Street lamenting how things had changed. The parking lots have turned into high rise hotel/gallerias. Nearing the end of the street, I glance to see the location of the old St. Louis Browns bar--gone; now a health club parking lot. This end of the block was the mecca of old school journalists; Ricardo's and the Billy Goat Tavern located under Michigan Avenue. I had not returned to this area for several years; the city had redone lower Michigan Avenue to displace all the homeless bums.

I get to the old Ricardo's to find that it has changed into an Italian Steakhouse, whatever that is. I turn the corner to find the Billy Goat sign still hanging in its proper place. As I begin my turn toward the bar, I notice what looks like a homeless guy in-between parked cars. Upon closer examination, I saw no plastic bags or shopping cart filled with tin cans. It could not be a homeless guy; but maybe one of those industrious window washing scam artists.

Of course the man was not who I expected as I approached. It was Professor Reed.

Now look around the room, is it not an easy confuse journalism professors with homeless persons? Remember Rule #1: truth is absolute defense.

Reed has not changed appearance since I've known him. I think he's still waiting for

the call as a stand-in in case one of the band members failed to show for the *Let It Be* album cover photo-shoot. I'll leave it to Tidwell to tell him he won't be the 5th Beatle.



I am surprised by the large turnout on such short notice. I did not receive a -30- making an announcement for this event. I think must of you know what -30- stands for: 30 years between publications. Which is fine, I just want the next edition to tell me if I got a job after graduation, and whether I'm doing okay.

One of the first sentences Reed would tell any freshman was "Go downstairs and work at the News." There was no discussion or retort to that command. As a freshman, you did not know any better. The concept appeared backwards; you enrolled to learn journalism, not to be thrown into a newsroom on Day One. I was no exception.

At the time, the department was in the Student Services Building. The News was on the

first floor. It has just upgraded its technology by abandoning stone tablets and chisels for IBM typewriters that weighed enough to be confused with a Buick. You had no idea what you were doing. You hand your first story to the editor, she reviewed it and said "Come back tomorrow." And you did.

The Newsroom was called the Cave because it had no windows; it was cramped, noisy and the main exit was usually guarded by an adult receptionist. It would be later that I learned that this situation had a technical name..... Stockholm Syndrome.

When Reed received his doctorate from SIU, that university was so impressed with him they actually gave Reed an actual sheepskin. The animal was still alive....but like his focus and mentoring of his students, I hate to say this at this banquet, but that sheep is just.... three credit hours short of getting its degree.

Reed was extremely proud of his students' grasp of the journalism fundamentals. He stressed the Five Ws. He would have his best students go to conventions and seminars to impress other colleges. There probably no greater moment when Reed's students boiled down the Five Ws into Two when Reed responded to a question with:

What
Windmill?

Reed also had pride in the accomplishments of journalism grads. He kept in touch with ev-

THE SPEECH

everyone, usually under the guise of hitting you up for a journalism donation. But he would invite accomplished alums back to campus to give guest lectures to his classes. He never invited me back.... probably because I'd "frighten the children."

It probably stems from the threat during the last two university presidential vacancies that I'd throw in my resume for the job. With the solid journalism background, you can clearly anticipate the questions that may be asked during such an interview. I knew exactly how I'd respond to the search committee's first question: what would you do to improve the student experience at Eastern? I'd tear down the business school and give the students back their South Quad, and then I'd use all those bricks and build a pyramid near Carmen Hall where the faculty and students could worship me. But that would probably "frighten the children."

But I have to give the Board of Trustees credit for actually completing one of my agenda items if president. They completed the large edition to Booth Library. However, my addition would have been a brew-pub.

One of the skill sets that a journalism student learned was balancing more than one crisis at a time. One the most frightening aspects was not getting enough credits to graduate. As a senior, it got really hard because you

were so indoctrinated into the News lifestyle, class schedules had to accommodate your work schedule. I had gone through all the journalism courses and my minor with classes starting a 8 a.m. and ending at 11. Then there was the next two hours at the radio station as a disc jockey. Then I had to get to the newsroom by 3 in order to get the editorial page completed on time. So that left a three-hour elective that started at 2 p.m. at the latest. In all the approved electives for journalism majors, only one course met the requirement: Introduction to Psychology.

With the prospect of no add-drop option, and the fact that I had paid for summer grad school classes, I had no choice but to sign up for Pysch 101. I get the to classroom, and head for the corner. The plan was just ride through course like a church mouse. Then the classroom filled with freshmen who were "psyched" to be in this class. At this point, dread was turning into an ulcer. Then the professor showed up. He stooped under the doorway and turned to the class. It was Rasputin. Now, I knew things were going to get weird.

He took out his notebook and began to call roll. I had not been in a class that called roll in years--- then halfway through, he paused, and said "this is unusual; I have never had a senior in this class before." Immediately, everyone turned in my direction. In the pinball world, I think the

moment would be called Irreversible Tilt.

After roll, the professor begins his lecture by asking a question --- and points to me for the answer. Now the tumblers of my last functioning brain cell click in-- he is trying to figure out whether I am a total screw-up, a psychopath, or a real student. Now, one of the things journalism teaches you is a lot of trivial information on a lot of subject matters. I don't recall the question, but I recalled I somehow answered it correctly. From that point forward, a truce was had-- he never called on me to answer a question; and I feverishly wrote in my notebook during class. Little did he know that I was writing my editorials and laying out News pages.

One of the things that you learned as a journalism major is how to assess a situation and react accordingly. It is a tangent of the infamous "follow-up question" line of reasoning. For example, after one late night at the News, I walked out of the Student Services Building on the way to burn the midnight oil to finish a term paper. But within two steps of the door, my path was blocked by a Volkswagen. The door swings open and someone says, "Hop in! We're off to pick up Lola." For those not familiar with the location, the Student Services Building is the middle of the North Quad. So journalistic instincts have to make split second decisions: go

THE SPEECH

do overdue homework assignments, or get into the car? Well, I can attest that you can fit a lot of journalism majors in a Beetle.

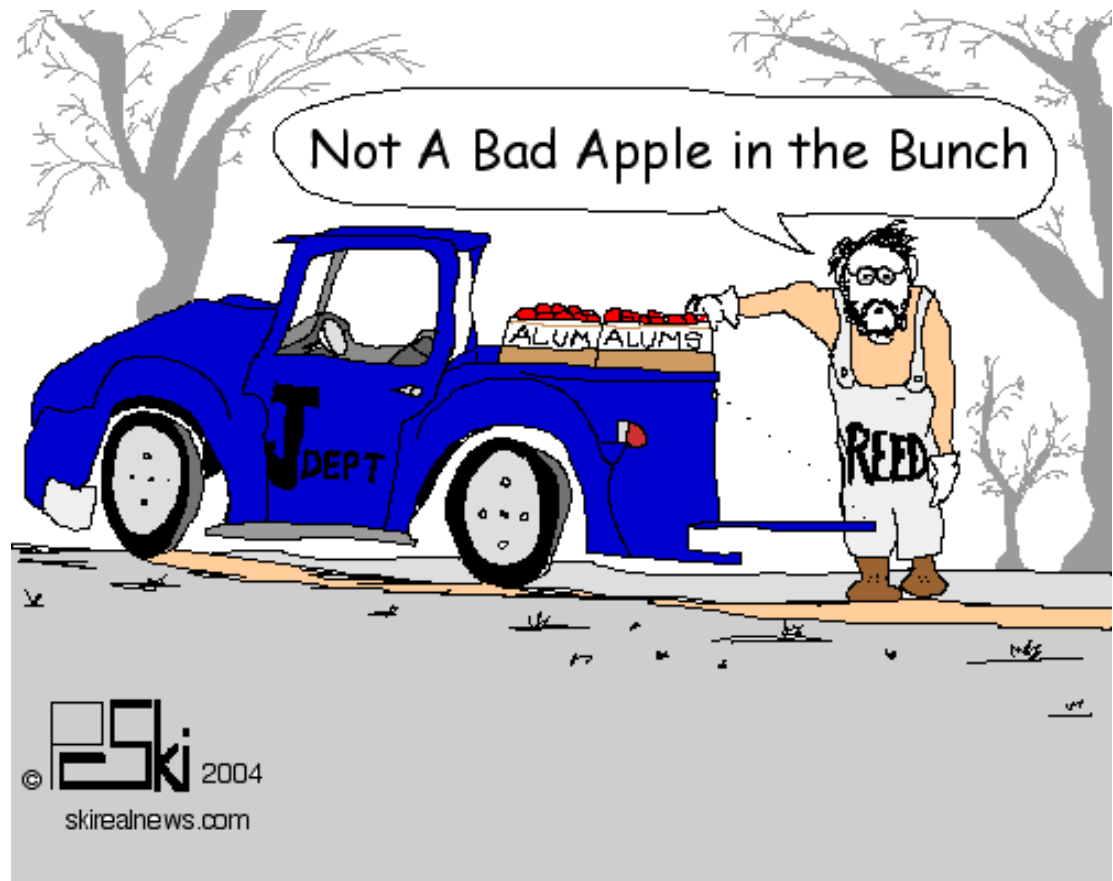
WE are here tonight to give our appreciation to Reed for helping us on our career paths. We were thinking of giving him a gift that he would remember. We thought of giving him a lifetime membership in PETA, but that may not be politically correct especially at a banquet. You know P.E.T.A.: the abbreviation for the group known as People Eating Tasty Animals.

So the default gift for old school journalists is a full flask concealed in brown paper bag. But we could not get the bag

away from the iron-grip clutches of Lori Miller.

So that leaves just our collective appreciation. So each of us has probably thought long and hard in regard to the impact of an EIU education has in our lives today....every morning you wake to a blank page that needs to be filled; you have to juggle three competing deadlines, you are underappreciated and overworked; when you are running from Point A to Point B in a rush you look down and see the needle bouncing off "E" and you hesitate to determine whether that is for gasoline or your social life; you're undecided whether the forming ulcer is a bad thing or

your new best friend; you can't understand why people you deal with have no common sense; some days are bitter, some days depressing, some days never ending, some days catatonic; when your pushed, you have to push harder back; and when you finally realize that banging your head on the wall won't change matters -- then I realize that I don't have to work in a newsroom because I have all the current symptoms of a modern journalist. Thanks Reed.



OLD WAYS DIE HARD cont.

of Northern Illinois were trying to block my route to Charleston.

There would be no excuses. Friends had told me that this was one of those “command” requests of mandatory attendance. No one had an idea who would actually show up, but it was the peer pressure that counts.

I caught up with Mr. Hash at Roc’s main bar after his evening of donkey basketball at the high school. Within two beers we were basically caught up to date on condensed version of St. Peter’s notes on our lives since the Kewanee weekend last summer. During the evening, a college student came in and asked the harried bartender if he could have a job application. He replied that there was a good turnover in wait staff as he handed him the app. Hash remarked, “good to know.”

The bar thinned quickly with the townies pocketing the remains of their unemployment checks from the bar. We were basically kicked out of the main bar at 11 p.m. The wait staff shooed us out as they set up 2 closing shots a piece at the end of the bar.

Back at the hotel, I thought I was transported back to Kewanee. The tap water smelled like wet kitty litter. Maybe the entire Illinois water table has been contaminated into vile feline liquid.

Matt was on campus Saturday morning because it was student orientation weekend; prospective students and parents

visitation. He was helping out the science department. As I wandered through campus, I remarked that parents would get a good impression of two linemen rutting outside Marty’s in a drunken altercation. It was 11 a.m. I don’t think that image was on the freshman orientation brochure.

Fleeing campus, one kills the afternoon on the prairie golf course, a hardpan flatland quirky run. Sun soaked, dead wind, and relatively easy play is the prescription for the weekend duffer’s first outing of the year. The Masters on Easter Sunday captivated the families huddled around the TV hearth. But take a professional and have him navigate around a course that features a par 4 that has its tee shot a 110 yard lay-up to a 90 degree 220 yard second shot cut through a tight wilderness, see what sailor vocabulary he has learned. That is the cornered charm of rural golf courses making do with any terrain features it can muster.

After a leisurely hack around the prairie, it was a quick sojourn back to Roc’s. The Saturday afternoon crowd was clearly non-student. Recent high school grads wandered in and out of the establishment, migrating between their fast food or theatre part time jobs. “They said I’d graduate but become nothing,” one said. The establishment was being run by the early 20s grunge food service worker. Bandana cooks and scruffy dishwashers would wander from back room

to beg a free shot and water from the bored barkeep.

If a Saturday afternoon is the pulse of the health of small town life, then Charleston is heading for critical care. The town’s population is 21,000, but EIU students accounted for 11,500. Once there is an imbalance in population, things change. The college is now the only center of commerce and growth. If it was not present, the town would have been boarded up.

So the Roc’s interplay was like a remake of an old brat pack movie without a plot. Add bottle fulls of depressants, you get a network television pilot that is left for dead on the cutting room floor.

It was time to head back to the hotel to prepare for the Reed appreciation dinner. As I get out of my car and proceed through the hotel parking lot, a man in dark sunglasses yells out my name. Now, he does not look familiar. He does not look like a process server.

He tries to goad me into guessing his identity. Having graduated decades ago with only one active brain cell, I can’t play that game. It’s John Plevka, an old college journalism colleague. I had not seen him in twenty years.

During our brief parking lot chat, he remarked that it was difficult to get reservations at the Worthington, the hotel hosting our event. He booked a room here because it was within stag-

OLD WAYS DIE HARD cont.

gering distance. Yes, we had similar steel-trap minds of editors.

Back in the room, Kerry Wood of the Cubs charges an ump in the 9th after being removed during a 3-2 loss. Dusty Baker's tantrum mentality has now boiled over into his players public behavior. An early season forged on the highest expectations, then grounded with numerous injuries, is now being compounded by possible suspensions. Only once in my lifetime has the Cubs had back to back winning seasons. If you are a historian, it will be a long, bitter but expensive season in Chicago.

The "big deal" was supposed to start at 6 p.m. at the Worthington. A one minute drive over to the parking lot was in order. Getting out of the car, I run into Reed and his family arriving for the event. Before getting through the main entrance, more alums began to emerge from the hotel balconies like seventeen year locust.

The hotel hallway quickly filled with a line of well dressed people snaking into the banquet room. We bypassed the check-in line for a direct route to the cash bar. It was supposed to be an old school journalism event, right? It was also a good area to buy drinks and catch the new arrivals as they made their way into the room.

This was the place where we would wonder if worlds would collide, old grudges resurface, and whether civility would

rise its mature head during the night. Journalists are cut from the grudge cloth. But to the pleasant surprise of most, people got along quite well.

Due to the potential rowdiness of our core group, it was quickly decided to claim two corner tables. Brian, Rich, Dru, Andy, Laura, Kurt, the Meekers and myself squeezed around one table. As the program of speakers made their way to the microphone, Brian's slurred logic of having Reed end the madness took root after his internal beer barometer hit a low point near 11 p.m. It turned into a rebuttal than speech.

Brian had put away enough beer to begin planning his red neck, white trash wedding at this very location. Somehow string cheese would play a prominent role in any possible nuptials.

Afterward, there was the post-banquet milling about the room, making final handshakes, exchange of business cards, and witty remarks. There was an hour to bar closing so the plan was to head back up to Roc's. In the parking lot I ran into Reed once again, who said that the post-party would be in the motel. I said I would return with others after a bar run.

Our thirsty group engulfed the side room and commanded the booths on both sides of the room. The word was spread about the post-post banquet party at the hotel room.

Considering we were the

best dressed patrons in the bar, service was normal until the liquor license should have expired. The lights went off in the main bar area, but the beers continued to flow. Three young women began to dance and grope around the bar. It was like a 3D advertisement for the Oxygen network.

Refreshed with the knowledge that speakeasy capitalism is still possible in America, we returned to the hotel courtyard for more beer and conversation. The alumni had spilled out of the hot room and into the sidewalk and parking lot in a noisy reverence which should have had some complaints since it was past 2 a.m.

By 3 a.m., most of the weak had packed in. We returned Brian's room for a morning cap. I recall Kurt trying to bet Brian on the outcome of the basketball game (which was being replayed on the television when we arrived). But as wasted as he was, Brian thought he may have remembered the winner but not the score.

From my note pad, there were two important quotes or principles from this session:

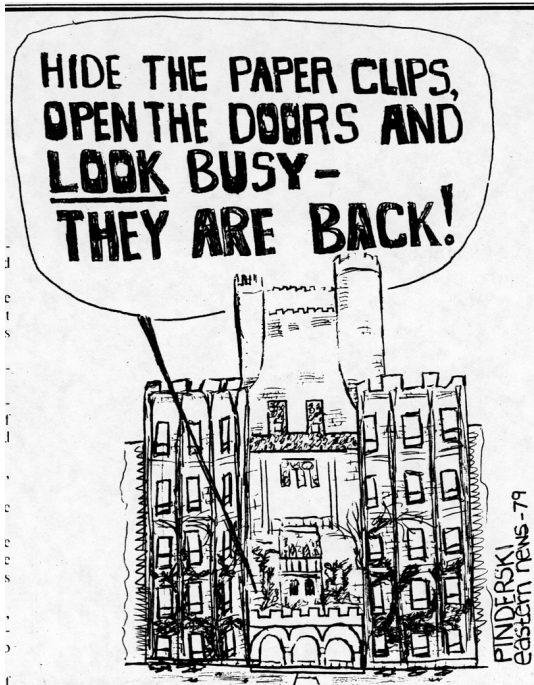
"Beef sticks and cheese sticks are more important than sex" -- Brian Nielsen.

"Don't leave your spouse alone during an after-after-after hours party." -- Fraembs' Rule #1.

The evening for this scribe ended at 4:30 a.m. By 9, I was refueling the car on a mad dash north on I-57.

You know when things get over the edge when your identity is stolen at the end of the evening. Rich Bauer, left, decides to impress the general public by changing his identity.

People are always trying to re-invent themselves or re-write history. Or is perception reality? Or is good times still good times even if you forget most of them?



FROM THE ARCHIVES

There was very little doubt on how college journalists felt about their administration at times. Left, is the first editorial cartoon of the school year. Below, the graduation editorial cartoon by Ski in 1980.

