

An ode to coffee

Lydia Pawlenko was Managing Editor in 1980. She began at Excalibur in 1978 and is currently a technical writer for an aerospace firm.

By LYDIA PAWLENKO

On this venerable occasion of *Excalibur's* 20th year, we owe at least an ounce of gratitude to coffee.

Without coffee, I doubt that a single issue of *Excalibur* would have been put to bed. In the most desperate hours of layout nights, we performed absolute miracles armed with only an X-ACTO knife and a cup of coffee.

I am writing this without delving into my hard-bound volume of *Excalibur's*, a prize rewarded to editors as they vacate their posts. There is no need to review clippings on budget cuts, tuition hikes, cafeteria boycotts and vandalism attacks to give testimony that one year was more tumultuous than the next. These events probably still challenge the reporting skills of *Excal* staffers. But I feel ashamed to admit that after being away from campus for a few years, they're muddled in my memory.

For clarity's sake, I'll keep my old *Excaliburs* on the shelf next to the outdated sociology texts I can't bring myself to part with.

I will remember instead what *Excalibur* taught me, that writing is hard work and I graduated into journalism without illusions. I eventually learned that coffee upsets my stomach and gives me insomnia. Luckily, my colleagues and I managed to gulp down ideals by the gallon; ideals that remain with us. They caused us to strive for perfection and overcome limitations, to ask more questions and seek life's truths with great determination.

Coffee fueled the ceremonial discussions, in which we pounded our knuckles on cafeteria arborite and recited our political and aesthetic judgements on the topic of the day. Between sips, we pondered world affairs: El Salvador, Afghanistan, Quebec, the Middle East, Bruce Springsteen and the latest sale at Cheapies.

The emotion-laden editorial meetings were conducted over a cup of you-know-what. Always held the morning after the layout night before, staffers jolted themselves awake with hits of caffeine to fend off weariness.

Those days when we distributed bundles of *Excaliburs* across the campus, hot off the press, were special indeed. We experienced that mystical feeling of being that much closer to what we assumed was journalistic sainthood—we gave it our all, got no sleep and drank too much coffee.

Now, pass me another cup. Here's to you, *Excal!*

Former sports editor finds journalism job-hunt frustrating

Edo "Rambo" Van Belkom started his *Excalibur* career in 1984, and became Sports Editor the following year. These days, Van Belkom is writing part-time for local community newspapers, although he likes to be considered "currently unemployed."

By EDO VAN BELKOM

I was, for a time, the sports editor at *Excalibur*.

I had the pleasure of cheering for the home team with more than a passing interest.

After two years I left, thinking I had all the marketable skills to sell myself to an employer in the journalistic field.

And why shouldn't I have thought that?

The sports section was running well. I was doing the odd story on the side, and I had everything I needed to know to become a top flight journalist.

And then I went out into the real world and the wheels fell off.

It is rather easy to distinguish yourself at *Excalibur*, simply because there are only a few people at York crazy enough to sacrifice everything just to work on the paper. All you have to do is give up the hunt for good grades, anything that resembles a social life, part time jobs and a little bit of sleep.

With these things done, you become a spoke in the wheel and if you do just a bit more you become part of the hub.

In the real world, there are scores of people who are willing to do this and many can do it better. Everything that made you special suddenly makes you average.

I don't know how many times I've been through this; it must be more than 100 times because I could rattle it off in the middle of the night without skipping a beat.

"Hello Mr. (. place name of editor here) my name is Edo van Belkom. I am calling to ask if you have any job openings. I was sports editor of *Excalibur*, the York University Community Newspaper, for two years. In that time I was responsible for every aspect of the section from story assignment to layout. I'm also quite

capable of doing news and have been doing feature articles for many community newspapers in the metro area."

These calls are usually followed by a "Hmm?" on the other end, and after a slight pause, "We're looking for someone with at least four years experience with hard news. Keep in touch."

These are not just isolated cases.

I knew of a job opening with the Aurora Topic, a small community paper that is based in Newmarket. The position required that the reporter cover the area between Newmarket and Lake Simcoe. I thought I would be perfect for the job and considering that the newspaper was so far away from the city, I assumed that only a few people would apply.

Nineteen people applied. A short list of six was made and I wasn't on it. The people who were on the short list lived in the area or had worked for the paper previously. Some were journalism school graduates.

In Aurora for crying out loud!

The journalism field is just as hard as any other to get into, and probably harder than most. The problem lies in everybody thinking that they can write for a living, just like me.

I haven't given up yet, it's just that if I don't crack somebody's starting line-up soon I may go back to driving a truck and make twice as much money as I would at a newspaper.

But this story doesn't have a sad ending, it's just depends on the way you look at things. I have been working part time for a couple of newspapers and selling the odd story here and there. Nothing to settle down on, just enough to bounce, bump and scrape my way from day to day.

And someday I will pass that strip-search they call an interview and join the ranks of the fully employed.

But more importantly, in *Excalibur's* 25th or 50th anniversary year, my name will be added to the honour roll of former *Excalibur* volunteers that have rise to prominence in the field of journalism.

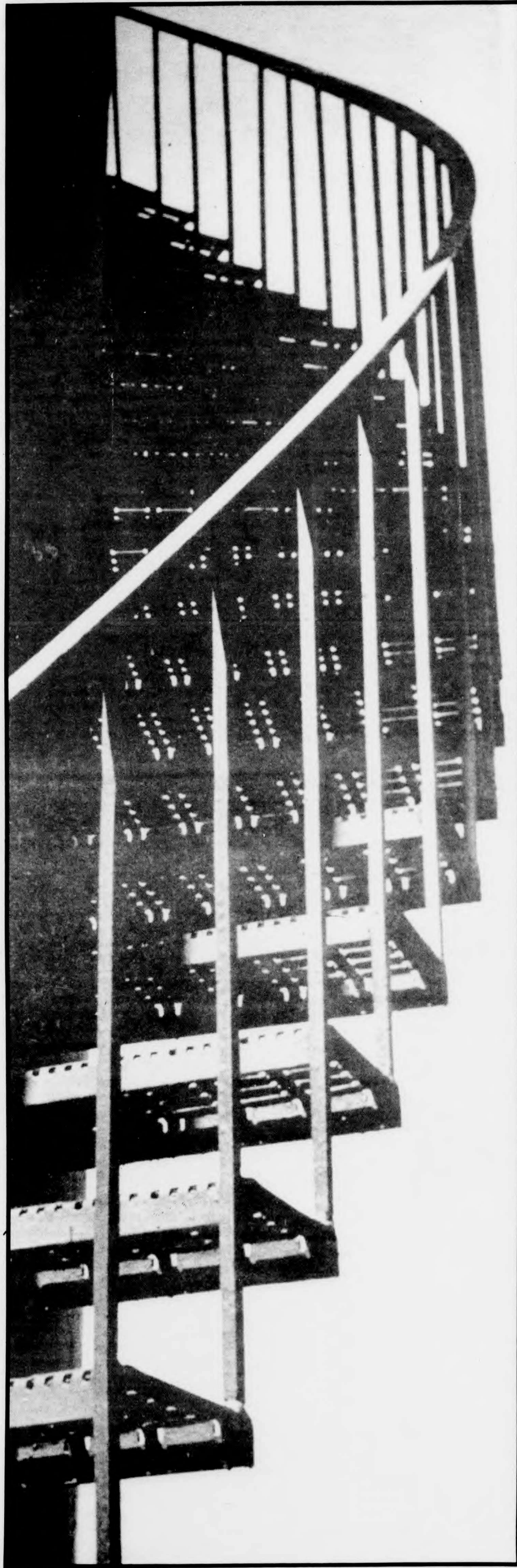
Only then, in select company, will I consider myself a success.

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JON YOUNG