

the writer's block

Ira Nayman is a York student with vast experience as a writer. Ira has written numerous newspaper columns as well as dabbling with CBC television and radio.

by Ira Nayman

THINGS THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN JOURNALISM SCHOOL, #3:

actually did production professionally.

For all of three months, I learned most of the basics of production at *Imprint* (which, by now, you should know was at the University of Waterloo), from John Bast. One could not create a character like Bast. He was a big, burly fellow who

when angered by a recalcitrant typesetter, used to bellow in a deep bass. "Lizard puking guts!" and "Jesus Christ on a crutch!" He read galactic conqueror-type science-fiction and played the meanest game of Asteroids of anybody I ever knew. Not only that, but he was a great production manager.

Production at *Imprint* sometimes came to resemble boot camp, and I have my share of horror stories. One year, Bast and I, with little help, produced a 36 page Orientation Issue over a three-day weekend. The next year, we produced a 64-page Orientation Issue in a week. I got 8 hours of sleep one

night during that week; 2 to 6 was more typical.

A few years later, a production position opened up at *Topic Newsmagazine*, a weekly tabloid in Bradford, a small town just outside of Newmarket. The editor wanted to add a second, weekend newspaper that would concentrate on entertainment, and they needed a creative layout person.

Keith Bolender, the editor, was another interesting character. He wasn't much older than I was, but as editor his authority was second only to the publisher's. He pushed for the second paper mainly be-

cause he wanted something fun to work on. One of Keith's proudest accomplishments was appearing as an extra in a crowd scene in the film *Network*, part of which was shot at Ryerson when he was studying journalism there; although I wouldn't be proud of photographic evidence of my hair being so long.

After I got the position, I had little contact with the publisher but I did attend one editorial meeting in his office.

He had taped copies of *USA Today* on one wall. He was enamoured of its production, and wondered if we could make *Topic* look like that. I blustered something approaching an affirmative response.

After the meeting, I pointed out to the production manager that comparing the two newspapers was ridiculous, that *USA Today* was a broadsheet, which required a different approach to layout. He shrugged.

As it happened, there wasn't much layout to be done at *Topic* or *Topic Lifestyles*, as the weekend paper was called. I spent a lot of time developing photographs for the staff photographer, and even worked a process camera once. (Somebody realized that my life is a struggle to the death with technology, so I didn't use the process camera again.)

To fill time, I started creating the weekly contests sponsored by a local restaurant, the prizes being dinners for two. After a

particularly lengthy entry, one of the staff writers remarked, "You're funnier bored than most people are straight!"

I try to wear it well.

Although the editorial staff loved *Topic Lifestyles*, the advertising staff was less than enthusiastic about it. In fact, they didn't sell it very much. Thus, a couple of months after it began, it became clear that the weekend paper would never grow large enough to justify its continued existence. This was a valuable lesson on the relative power of the editorial and advertising departments.

As it happened further, the whole question was moot. Around the time I joined *Topic*, it was bought by a chain very active in southern Ontario. Three months after I was brought in to work on the second paper, it was discontinued. A couple of months after that, *Topic* was absorbed by the chain's Newmarket newspaper; it ceased to exist.

If I had stayed at *Topic* until it was closed, I probably could have gotten a production job at another of the chain's papers. But, the chain viewed production staff as expendable, and treated them accordingly. In any case, the whole episode soured me on professional journalism, especially as it is practised in small towns.

That's what happens when you find out where the real power in journalism lies

eve's mental tension

by Roslyn Angel

It's a dance. It's a film. It's a concert. It's *Eve*, the play. It's a ritual. It's a spirit. It's a seance. It's York playwright Erick Fabris' theatre with a twist.

Set in the year 2020, *Eve* is about a schizophrenic playwright, Helen Walker, who disappears for five years, re-appears for three days and then disappears.

The play is set in Victoria Nelson Mental Hospital where Helen, in her re-appearance, dreams about a play she wrote years before. Her play, set in 1960, is portrayed on video in the performance. The audience will not only be watching *Eve*, but also Helen's play *Eileen*. In fact, the audience

will become part of the play as "the performers envelope them," said Fabris.

"The main idea [in the play] is change," said Fabris, "and with it comes mental tension and friction that reaches its highest point." Fabris feels that everyone has to deal with tension at some point in their lives. Helen simply cannot handle her tension. Fabris added, "She's fearing for her identity."

Eve will take the audience through time and space. It sounds like something out of the twilight zone, but Fabris hopes the audience "will walk out of the play with having faced something that might bring a good feeling to them."

Fourth year theatre student and co-director Marion deVries said she "is breaking every rule [she's] ever learned," but the whole process of this production has been fascinating.

Dancers, actors, musicians and visual arts, philosophy and science students have been involved in this production. Fabris said the performers have been incredible especially because they have had to interact with individuals from different media.

Eve, shifting between comedy and tragedy, is at the Samuel Beckett Theatre until March 23. Tickets are \$4.

Watch out though, rumour has it that the play may "evoke the spirit of Helen Walker."

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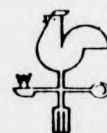
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