

OPINIONS

Activism, journalism make for a poor partnership

by Paulette Peirol

I was a cool fall day and I was suffering from a particularly intense episode of nicotine withdrawal, feeling on edge and unpredictable, when I saw a group of people huddled at the front steps of Kingston's City Hall.

Curiosity nudged me closer. It was a protest, I soon realized — another weekend protest of something-or-other, probably organized by the Action for Social Change committee.

As an editor at the city's daily newspaper, I had another name for the group; Adopt-A-Cause. One week we'd find them camping out in former MPP Ken Keyes' office protesting logging in Temagami and getting arrested over it; another week they'd be on a chartered bus heading for New York City with the aim of shutting down Wall Street to protest the corporate sell-out of Earth Day; and yet another night they could be found disrupting the Sunset Ceremony performed as a tourist attraction at Old Fort Henry. The cause that time was the presence of the army during the Mohawk standoff at Oka last summer.

Then there were the hoaxes. The Canadian Press wire service called us one night asking if we had a story on low-level military flights planned for the Kingston area. Low-level what? we asked.

We sent a reporter off to investigate. Signs had been posted all over the city announcing low-level military flights similar to the ones in Labrador. We made the requisite calls to Canadian Forces Base Kingston, and they denied any involvement in the campaign. Sure enough, Action for Social Change had struck again — this time getting national coverage.

The worst was the recent Gulf crisis hoax. "There's someone on the line who's calling about conscription for



the Gulf War — and the Whig-Standard's phone number is on the conscription sign," our answering service said. The phone lines were busy all night, and we were not amused. Again, the story was printed across Canada.

Action for Social Change members have never owned up to the Gulf hoax, but we suspect it was indeed them. The trick was on us, and they had reason to target the city's main media outlet — a right-leaning newspaper that had abruptly stopped giving the group press coverage.

But what the group never stopped to consider was why their causes were being ignored.

"I felt used," was the candid response of the reporter who covered the Wall Street protest. "I fraternized with the enemy. Late, slept and marched with them for a whole weekend."

What he got in return was every reporter's nightmare: constant budgeting at home by group members and a reputation for being less than impartial.

I thought about this as I sat on the steps of City Hall and debated whether I should participate in the group's latest effort — a redefining of Kingston's history through the eyes of natives. At least one group member recognized me as being from the newspaper.

"I'm not a reporter anymore," I told him without being asked. I wanted to make it clear I was not representing the media at that time. I wanted to march with them, to be a part of it all, to feel the thrill of civil disobedience, however tame or innocuous. Growing up in the 1970s, I never had that opportunity. This was my big chance.

We walked for miles, for hours, through parks strewn with red October leaves, bonded by the silent camaraderie of strangers sharing a common cause. We stopped at one point at the Prison for Women, where a powwow was being held inside. Inmates were grieving together the loss of three natives among them who had killed themselves in recent months.

I thought back tears — of sadness, of

anger, but mostly frustration, feeling utterly ineffectual. Yet I was moved, and that was enough to make the three-hour walk more than worth it.

We were rounding the last bend, about 20 minutes from our final destination, when I was accosted by group members demanding that I write about the event. When I refused, they tried to make me feel guilty. They were adamant that I publicize their latest cause.

Suddenly, I wanted to run and hide. I was not prepared to turn the personal into the political. I wanted to experience the event, not report about it in the style we are taught to call objective. And besides, I was an editor. That was my final excuse for not writing.

I've since gone back to reporting, covering cops and prisons no less, and I'm sure any tears I shed will be private. I don't know if a reporter can ever become too hardened. Too desensitized, perhaps, or insensitive. But the hardness is a strength — the courage to look when others might turn away, to dig deeper for information despite threats from those in power.

Radicals and reporters in some sense need each other. They always will. But like politicians and the media, they can't get too close — or more importantly be perceived as close.

The activists will accuse us of being superficial, and their charges will be justified. But you can get truly involved in an issue without taking a stand.

They want us to take a stand. They want us to stand by them. But the media can't afford to hold anyone's hand.

The Action for Social Change committee didn't quite get me. But they made me do some thinking.

Paulette Peirol was managing editor for the Excalibur in 1986/87. She has worked for the Kingston-Whig Standard ever since.

APPLE Computers



Micro York

Operated by Computing and Communication Services
104A Steacie Science Library
736-5274 - FAX: 736-5662

Serving York University's
Administration, Faculty,
Staff and Students
Store Hours:
Mon to Thurs. 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Friday 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Macintosh IIxc

The Computer

- 16MHz 68020 microprocessor
- 2MB of memory (Expandable to 4MB)
- Apple SuperDrive (1.44MB)
- 40MB Hard Disk Drive
- LC Keyboard
- On-board video support (4 bit)
- Sound input capability built-in
- 12" RGB Colour Display

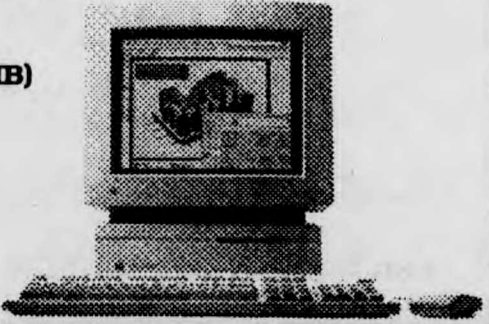


| | | |
|----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Computer System Only | with Apple StyleWriter Printer and printer cable | with HP DeskWriter and printer cable |
| \$ 2,835 | \$ 3,399 | \$ 3,579 |

Macintosh IIsx

Features:

- 20MHz 68030 microprocessor
- 3MB of memory (Expandable to 17MB)
- Apple SuperDrive (1.44MB)
- 40MB Hard Disk Drive
- Extended Keyboard II
- On-board video support
- Sound input capability built-in
- 12" RGB Colour Display



| | | |
|----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Computer System Only | with Apple StyleWriter Printer and printer cable | with HP DeskWriter and printer cable |
| \$ 4,249 | \$ 4,799 | \$ 4,999 |

Sale ends April 26, 1991. Orders must be in by April 17, 1991. While quantity lasts. Prices Subject to change without notice.

SUMMER JOBS

NOW INTERVIEWING FOR CAMP STAFF POSITIONS

Group Counsellors, Swim Staff, Unit Heads
Also
Activity Specialists in Crafts, Dance, Pottery, Photography, Computers, Riding, Woodcraft, Farm Animals, Gymnastics, Camp Shows.

"For the Best Summer of Your Life"

ESTABLISHED IN 1966

GREEN ACRES DAY CAMP

70 acre country setting in Markham
Daily transportation to camp is provided.
For an interview appointment call:
887-1400 Weekdays 9 to 5



Crystal Court

FINE CHINESE & SZECHUAN CUISINE
Fully Licensed
1300 Finch Avenue West, Downsview, Ontario M3J 3K2
(Keele/Finch)

晚
夜
奉
送
特
別
靚
湯

- *Dining Lounge
 - *Business Luncheon Special
 - *Take Out or Delivery
 - *Special Occasion Party & Birthday Party
- 合
時
火
鍋
上
市
- 無
任
歡
迎
- 堂
食
外
賣
- 炒
粉
麵
飯
- 名
仔
麵
板
- 粵
菜
燒
臘
炒

(Delivery start at 11:30a.m.)
739-6600

Business Hours
Mon-Thurs 11:30 am - 12 Midnight
Fri-Sat 11:30 am - 1:00 am
Sun.-Holiday 12:00 noon - 11:00 pm

ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT LUNCH BUFFET WITH SALAD

12 noon to 2:30 p.m.
Monday-Thursday \$6.50 Friday \$7.50

華
晶
閣