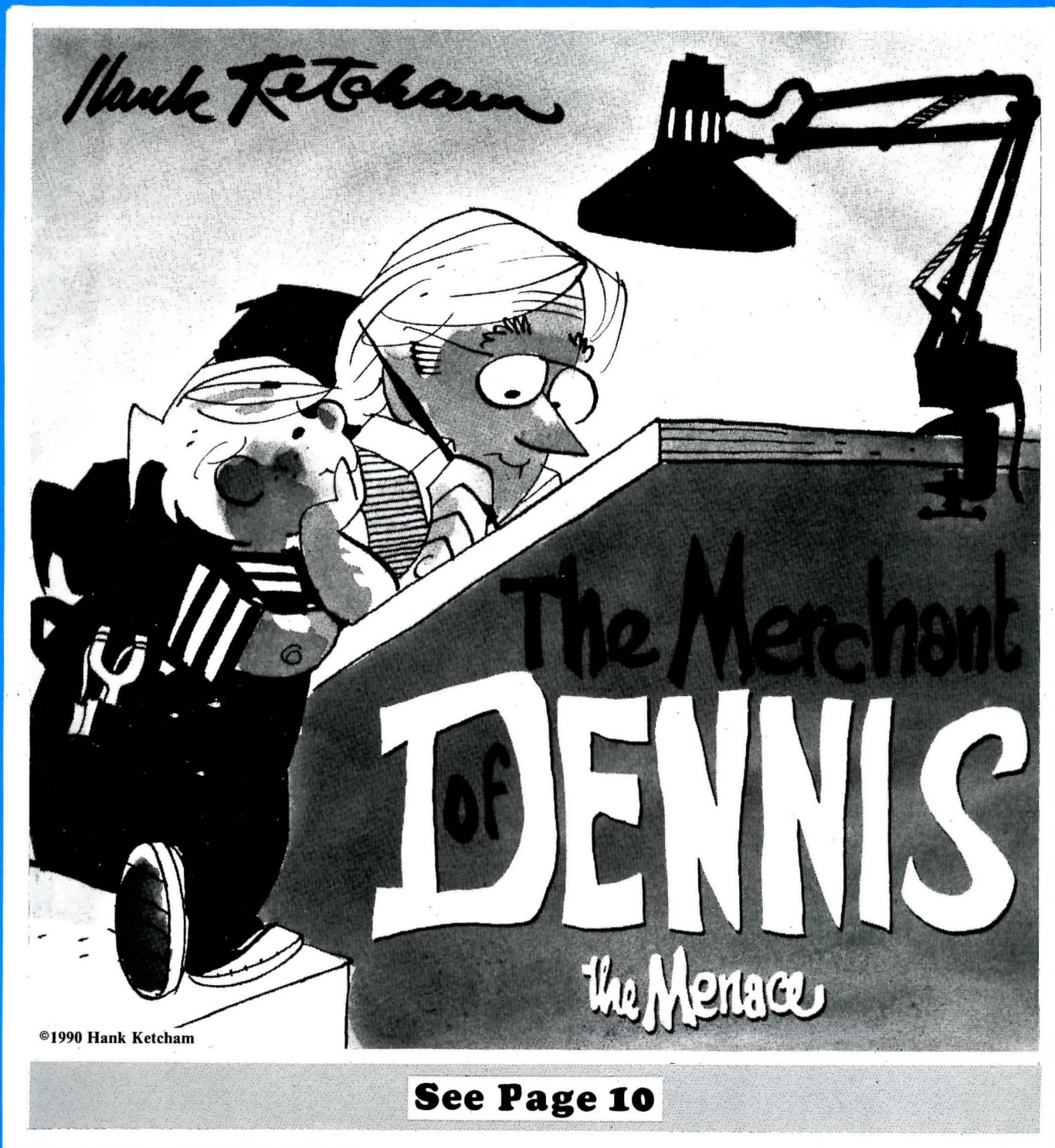


CARTOONIST PROfiles

NO. 87, Sept. 1990

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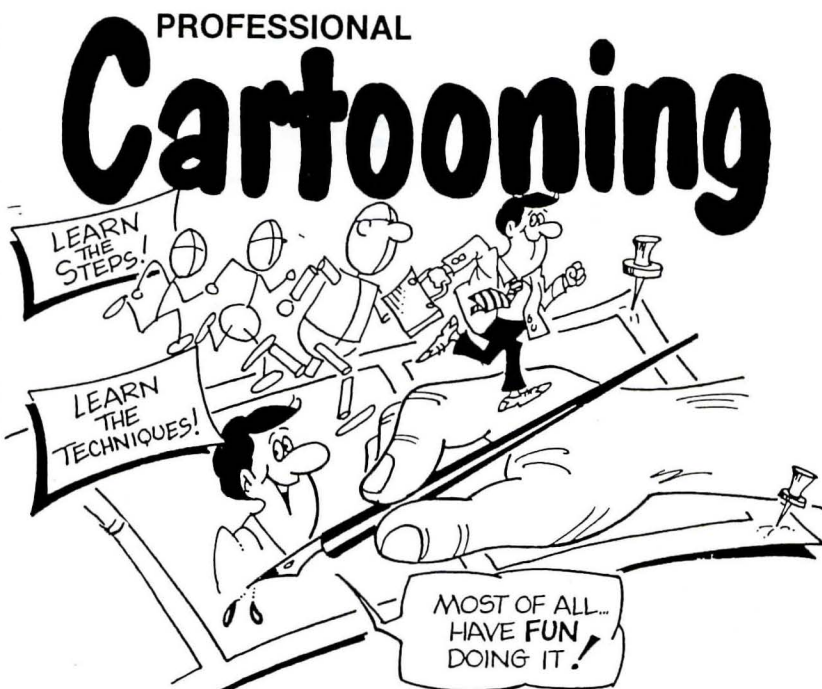
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An Editor as His Own Cartoonist

It's an almost unheard-of situation when a newspaper editor also does his own editorial cartoons. That's why we thought you'd particularly enjoy the following story which Jesse Earle Bowden, Editor and Vice President of the Pensacola, Florida News Journal, wrote at our request. We very much appreciate his taking the time from these double duties to tell us how he does it.

by Jesse Earle Bowden

Word editorialists comment with the turn of inked phrases. Strong verbs pushing concrete nouns.

Cartoonists satirize the world they see with ink lines and symbolic images. Sometimes broadaxing hypocrisy and pomposity.

Since 1965 I've tried to combine the two artforms in my work on opinion pages of the *Pensacola News Journal*. As cartoonist, I've tried to follow a grand tradition given us by the masters, beginning with English artist William Hogarth, peppering sketchy, or unfinished images with wit, parody, satire and imaginative absurdities applied to the political process or any form of the human condition.

If we editorialists are persuasive, our readers react; action can result.

If we cartoonists are lucky, readers either laugh, cry, complain, applaud or remain boringly silent. If the message is powerful enough — as masters create them — readers may be moved to action.

After all, unlike editorials — requiring the task of reading — we have only a few seconds to convey an idea with a 46-pica graphic image.

Yet behind the scenes, creating symbolic images at the drawing board, we turn our own fun into ink lines and blobs that run roughshod across the rugged ter-

rain of politics and public affairs.

We like to think we hit human greed, political mismanagement and public lethargy in the marketplace of ideas. We try to shape public opinion, galvanize public action; sometimes we try to expose politicians too big for their britches. Said one of my idols, Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Bill Mauldin, "If it's big, hit it. You can't go far wrong."

As political commentators, we are illustrators—exaggerating faces in caricature; casting politicians and policymakers in strange, humorous and fantasy situations. Mostly, it's a morning chuckle; in time, if the issue is recycled enough, it can become public outcry.

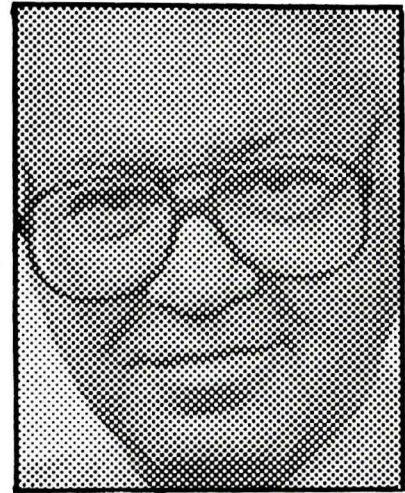
The editorial cartoon can be a strong point drawn from complex information in a few simple lines, deeply biting, chillingly candid, somehow without being personally offensive; an artistic function making the reader suddenly see familiar facts with a new eye.

The cartoon can be the cocktail or salad before the main meal — words we editors write.

As editor-cartoonist, I create images of a smaller world — mostly centered on Pensacola and the Gulf Coast region of Florida I know: West Florida, the "rooftop" of the peninsula known as the Panhandle; sometimes "Forgotten Florida."

And I've observed the region — Florida's westernmost city and Escambia County — as an editor and cartoonist for the *News Journal* since 1953. On sports pages as sports editor, news pages as news editor; and since 1965, as editorialist, senior editor and chairman of the editorial board, the commentary pages.

I've drawn thousands that have measles *News Journal* pages — most illustrative of the people, events and public issues of the region. Moreover, as editorialist, columnist and sometimes feature and interpretative writer, I've surrounded them with millions of words.



**EARLE
BOWDEN**

Portraying nearly four decades, the local cartoons scratched out as working drawings for the engraver's camera and the etched metal for the newspaper press are images for the topical moment representing community issues and arguments that seem never to end.

Yet collectively they bridge a continuity of Pensacola change, often historically redundant in their graphic plea for public action I've envisioned as editor for community, regional and state improvement. And, looking back over them now, compiling a book for publication titled *Rejoicing in a Limited Palette: An Editor-Cartoonist Draws Fire*, the images represent endless arguments, peaks and valleys, trial and error, victories and defeats. Too, they are moods of reverence for history and patriotism and their place and mood in Historic Pensacola, a U.S. Navy town known as the "Cradle of Naval Aviation" and "Annapolis of the Air," since 1914; the seaport sharing with St. Augustine origins of Spanish Florida in the sixteenth century.



Most days — especially Sunday — the local cartoon fortifies the lead editorial focusing on local or regional issues, either written by me or Editorial Page Editor Paul Jasper or Associate Editor Jackie Brooks.

Our philosophy is simple: the closer home, the greater the editorial's and cartoon's impact. And the greater the *News Journal's* responsibility. We feel we can be effective in our own ball park; we leave *Afghanistanism* to others who perceive their opinion pages only for thought leaders and well-read individuals more intrigued by academic debate than issues on Main Street and in neighborhoods.

Unlike cartoonists with national distribution — caricaturing instantly recognizable figures — I choose to focus on the homefront, with key players lesser known

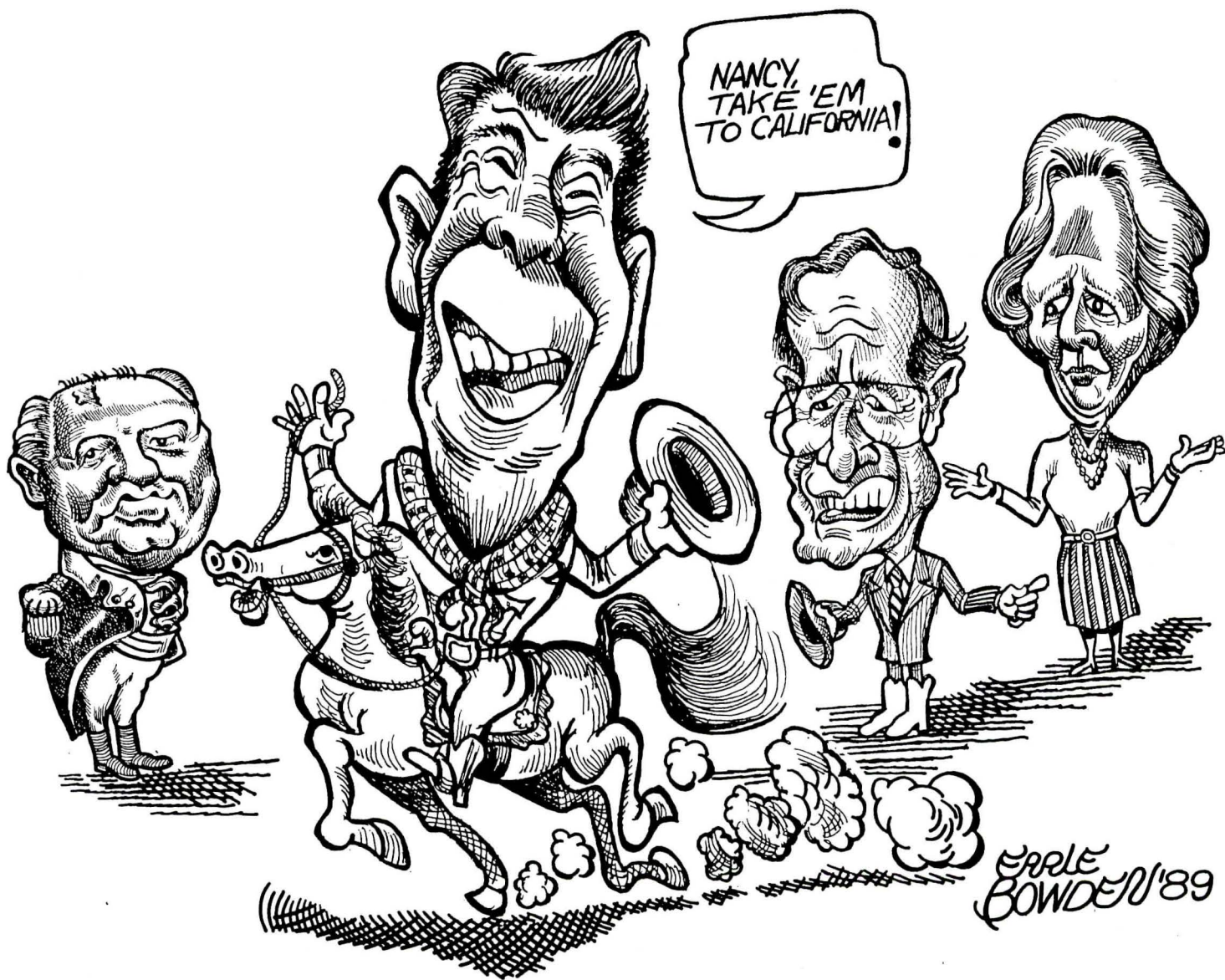
and requiring more exact likenesses and labeling: local government, state politics, regional issues, controversies. If there's a theme rather than ideology, it has illuminated a Jeffersonian, moderately conservative but liberal-on-human rights editorial policy for more efficient local government, and improved quality of life for Pensacolians and West Floridians.

From the outset, I realized nationally syndicated cartoonists we have published through the years — among them, Herblock, Bill Mauldin, Ranan Lurie, and now Jeff MacNelly, Jim Borgman and Gary Brookins — were far more qualified to comment on national and international topics of the day. But as Mauldin once said, local cartoonists are more effective in causing action — an idea I've used for Sunday pages and on other days when

our paper addresses hot local topics.

Editorial cartoons are mostly a big-city phenomenon. Small or medium-sized dailies too long thought they couldn't afford their own political cartoonists. Yet improved technology in the Graphic Age and rise of art departments as essential to attractive newspaper design and production have increased the field with smaller newspapers featuring more local cartoons.

In my case — employed by a newspaper of more than 75,000 circulation that had never had a staff cartoonist and relied solely on syndicated material — producing artwork was from the outset secondary to editing and writing responsibilities. Yet with dual duties, cartooning is a pleasant challenge I crowd into a busy week as an editor and writer and community activist. Drawing is rewarding



therapy, partially satisfying my youthful yearning to be a writer-illustrator.

Moreover, through the years I've championed American liberty and patriotism with traditional symbolism; crusaded for preservation and promotion of Pensacola's four centuries-old historical heritage. Whether it's "dirtroad politics," better highways, saving historical landmarks, revitalizing downtown Pensacola or quality education, the cartoon images convey my conviction about the city and region where I've been privileged to live and work and draw pictures since arriving as a 25-year-old sports writer on September 30, 1953.

I was an eager, energetic former U.S. Air Force second lieutenant in late September 1953 when I drew my first *News Journal* sports cartoon. On the dining

table at home, using a crow quill pen, No. 3 Winsor and Newton brush and black lithographic crayon, I drew the helmeted head of Pensacola's leading schoolboy football hero on Coquille Board and wreathed the portrait with smaller cartoony characters in the grand style of Willard Mullin, whose masterful sports art I admired in *The Sporting News*.

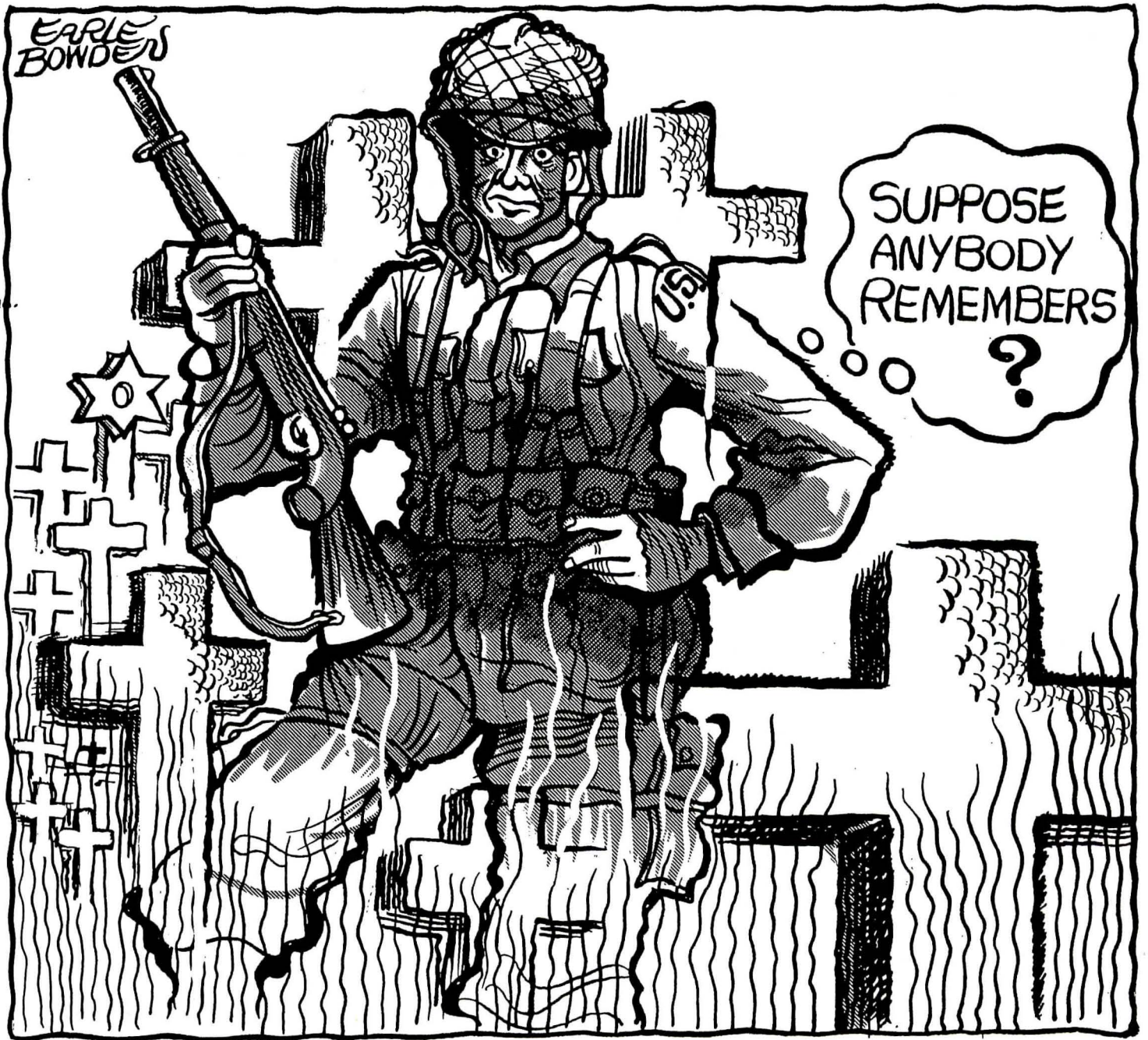
The Sunday cartoon became a regular sportspage feature in the 1950's; I often used the multi-column graphic of sports personalities as illustration for my Sunday column or personality feature.

Sports cartoons as drawn by masters Mullin, Lou Darvas and Murray Olderman — shaded with crayon; sometimes Ben Day — were fashionable during my sportswriting days. And I find many of today's slicks, often computer-crafted

sports graphics — like many other newspaper cartoon features and illustrations — lack the spark, spontaneity and versatility of the sure hand of superior craftsmen like Mullin, Darvas and Olderman.

Across the years, just as I changed with the times and the city, developed new interests such as the study of American and Southern history, and matured as a newspaper editor and book author who still drew cartoons, the lines, the figures, the cartoon style evolved.

But not my unorthodox pattern of creating cartoons — mostly during quiet, less-pressured off-duty hours at home. I still work at a small dining table in our den, a late-night habit causing mini-grief with the joy. Often my wife Mary Louise complains of India ink blackening carpets or souring supper.



My art training was limited; cartooning has been a self-taught evolution. As a teenager growing up in the small West Florida town of Altha I completed two Washington School of Art correspondence lessons, filled Big Chief school notebooks with drawings and dreamed of enrolling in the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts.

I admired the every-wrinkle-must-show *chiaroscuro* style of Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* and *Steve Canyon*, Al Capp's *L'il Abner*, Mauldin's *Willie and Joe*, Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* and *Rip Kirby*, Burne Hogarth's *Tarzan*

and Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant*, Herblock's, Daniel Fitzpatrick's and David Low's editorial cartoons and Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* illustrations.

Yet, torn by ambitions of becoming either an illustrator or cartoonist, and equally dreaming of a writing career, I studied journalism at Florida State University. Struggling through art composition, lettering and beginning oil painting, I became disenchanted with abstract and impressionistic art then in vogue in the FSU art department. I earned a journalism degree, minoring in political science.

But as sports editor and then associate editor of the FSU *Florida Flambeau*, I drew cartoons for the student newspaper and supplied free-lance sports feature stories and cartoons for regional weeklies and the daily *Panama City News Herald*. I developed an aborted *Flambeau* comic strip, *Rod Carson*, a pipe-smoking, trenchcoat-clad international television journalist modeled closely on Caniff's *Steve Canyon*.

I found sports and editorial cartooning less hectic and more suited to my goals as writer-illustrator. In 1951 I wrote a sports column and drew sports cartoons regu-



larly for the *News Herald* before entering the U.S. Air Force during the Korean Conflict.

An Air Force journalist at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, I helped launch the base newspaper, *The Planesman*; as editor I drew portraiture cartoons on base personalities as a regular feature. Then in Officer Candidate School at Lackland AFB Base at San Antonio, I was inspired by the work of young talented cartoonist Dick Locher, an upper classman whose

striking cartoons illustrated *Shavetail*, the 1953 OCS yearbook.

When the Korean Conflict ended, I joined the *News Journal* as a \$65-a-week sports writer and cartoonist. For cartoons the editor fattened my paycheck with \$10 extra from petty cash. But pay was secondary; my foot was in the door and artwork on daily newspaper pages.

I began with the classic, so called ashcan style developed in the 1920s and 1930s — ink lines combined with lithographic

pencil shading on pebble board, same as Herblock of the *Washington Post* continues in classic form today.

Across the years I followed the trends, using pebble board, Craftint, and returning to the genre of the loose, sketchy lines and crosshatching of early classic American pen-and-ink illustration — like Jim Morin, MacNelly, Brookins, Borgman and David Seavey of *USA Today*.

I strive for textures with lines and dots on 11-by-14 inch Strathmore Bristol Board, using a variety of instruments — No. 2 and 3 brushes, crow quill and Speedball pens, inexpensive Sheaffer cartridge pen filled with Higgins Black Magic India ink, Pilot fine point permanent, even permanent ballpoints and markers, especially Sharpie.

I never thought much about style, although in the early years I drew very large, necessitating heavily inked lines for reduction for sharper hot-metal reproduction. Heavier lines remain; I break all rules: too much labeling, recycle recognizable symbols — Thomas Nast's Uncle Sam, Democratic donkey, Republican elephant. But it's fun, couching local editorial points in historical-scene analogy.

Not being a member of the "comic-book" generation, among them Pat Oliphant, MacNelly, Borgman, Mike Peters, Tony Auth, Dick Wright, Doug Marlette, Paul Szep, Bill Sanders, Dick Locher — I'm more comfortable with the more symbolic elements of an earlier age when cartoons dominated pages with powerful messages rather than elevating biting, gag-panel humor above the editorial statement.

The illustrative impact and clarity in viewpoint of local cartoons can be more effective for local topics than clever gags poking fun at national newsmakers.

Among many successful *News Journal* editorial and cartoon campaigns was establishment of Gulf Islands National Seashore, which I first suggested in columns and cartoons in the early 1960s. More than 50 cartoons advocating the national park ignited an eight-year editorial campaign that pitched pro-beach development advocates against a rising environmental movement; in January 1971, President Nixon signed the congressional act establishing the seacoast recreational and historical park stretching from Santa Rosa Island and Pensacola

harbor west to the Mississippi barrier islands. Today the park is one of the nation's most visited national seashores.

In the 1970s and 1980s I turned more to caricature for humorous portraiture of local and state newsmakers — many now hang in homes and offices of Pensacolians and on walls of businesses, including a collection of local and Florida politicians decorating the walls of the Irish Politicians Club in McGuire's Irish Pub, a popular Pensacola watering hole. Many cartoons and illustrations have been published in books, including four historical books I have written on Pensacola and the West Florida region. I continue to design book dust jackets and have illustrated *The Write Way*, a guidebook I've written and use as text for journalistic writing courses I teach as a faculty associate at the University of West Florida.

Maybe more than just cartoons, my drawings reflect the people and events in my small part of the world from the 1950s through the 1980s. Together, they are an editor's thematic sketchbook in the fight for good government, preservation of heritage and belief in the quality of life in a Florida region known as Florida's Last Frontier.

There are fewer ideological cartoonists now, and almost none specifically Democratic or Republican. Yet using humor more than stark symbolism, they again wield a new kind of power — particularly compared with practitioners of the 1930s, '40s and '50s.

Yet I'm pleased many cartoonists have moved away from the more vertical, crayon-solid figure and somber comment. Influenced by modern illustrators, such as Ronald Searle, one of the best British satirists, they tend toward sketchy, fine-line caricature, approaching their targets with rapier wit rather than broadaxe attacks. They reflect several societal trends: greater visual sophistication on the part of readers, demand for more entertainment, changing attitudes about political institutions.

With some of the early titans and most independent publishers with strong political opinions passed from the scene, editorial cartoonists have a new role of satisfying the greater demand for humor, crystalizing complex events of the day and creating visuals drawing readers to



opinion pages. The modern editorial cartoon may inform, and may persuade, but above all, it must attract.

As far as I know, having researched the field and asked editors, working cartoonists and syndicate officials, I'm unique as a senior news executive drawing his own editorial-page cartoons.

One *News Journal* wag, aware cartoonists usually work for editors and many still must clear artwork through an editor before publication, said, 'He's the only cartoonist I know who approves his own work.'

Maybe so. But as editor *and* cartoonist

I draw fire on my own responsibility. I illustrate policies of the five-member editorial board rather than depicting my own personal ideology. Yet, at times, stimulating editorial thinking for the board, I draw the cartoon before writing the editorial.

Some editors who work without cartoonists say they've never found one who could draw what they desire for editorial pages.

At least since I became editorial page editor in 1965, and for the 23 years I've been senior editor, I've not faced that problem. ●