

# Moon: Seashore perhaps Bowden's greatest legacy

Troy Moon, pnj.com 11:59 a.m. CST February 17, 2015



(Photo: Pensacola News Journal)

Winter's crackle creeps still, with the beckoning finger of a promised rebirth - spring, that seasonal phoenix - that will transform the sullen gray and brown landscape with a panoply of luscious hues and luring scents, chasing away the fading chill that haunts the shrouded days and nights.

OK, I'll stop. I'll never be able to write like J. Earle Bowden. Few can and could. That rich, flowing prose was a trademark - maddening to some, but a celebration of "real" writing to others - that made J. Earle Bowden one of the most celebrated writers in Northwest Florida history. Bowden died Sunday. He was 86 years old.

Yes, J. Earle Bowden was a top-notch journalist. A celebrated editorial cartoonist with a style as unique as his own writing. Yes, he is Pensacola's most legendary newspaper man, guiding the Pensacola News Journal for decades.



PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

[PNJ Editor Emeritus J. Earle Bowden has died](#)

<http://www.pnj.com/story/news/2015/02/15/j-earle-bowden-passes-away/23456675/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>

Bowden was an instructor of mine before I became his employee. I was a student in his creative writing class at the University of West Florida back in the 1980s. Mr. Bowden would tease me for years afterward.

"Troy, you were a great student. You might have even received an A instead of a C if you had only shown up for class."



Langdon Beach lifeguards keep an eye on swimmers enjoying the beach. Langdon Beach is located near Ft. Pickens and is part of the Gulf Islands National Seashore. (Photo: Bruce Graner/bgraner@pnj.com)

But I could never write like "Earle," as we all called him.

And sure, I'm a newspaper dude myself. But for me, Bowden's greatest legacy is not in the pages of the Pensacola News Journal, but on the pristine beaches and landscape that we have come to treasure.



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[Former colleagues, friends share memories of J. Earle Bowden](#)

<http://www.pnj.com/story/news/2015/02/15/friends-colleagues-react-to-j-earle-bowden-death/23459783/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>

Bowden is known as The Father of the Gulf Islands National Seashore for his effort to preserve miles and miles of beachfront property from development in the 1960s and early 1970s. He used his newspaper position as a bully pulpit to help establish the Gulf Islands National Seashore. Imagine our beaches without that protection. Condos from here to Navarre. Tacky T-shirt shops would replace dunes. Beach bars would replace the quiet and beauty of nature. A slice of perfection would have been lost forever. We would have probably torn down Fort Pickens and replaced it with a Bass Pro Shop. Bowden helped make sure that would never happen.



[PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL](#)

[WSRE to rebroadcast 2012 J. Earle Bowden interview](#)

<http://www.pnj.com/story/news/2015/02/17/wsre-rebroadcast-j-earle-bowden-interview-week/23554277/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>

To me, that's Bowden's legacy, or at least a major part. So many people enter the world of journalism to make a difference — despite the protest of those who abhor "activist" journalism. But how many of us truly do? (I turned a few people into fans of country pioneers the Flatlanders years ago after a review; that's not quite the same legacy, is it?)



View of the west tip of Ship Island from Fort Massachusetts that is part of the Gulf Islands National Seashore. (Photo: National Park Service)

What Earle gave us - gave us all - is something that outlast us all. Generations that have yet been born will benefit from his foresight and wisdom. They might not know it. But when they put those towels down on the beach, walk the sand searching for shells, wade through the waters, undisturbed by the hustle and bustle of "progress," they'll have J. Earle Bowden to thank.

J. Earle Bowden was a great newspaperman. He was an even greater Pensacolian. We'll miss him. But we won't forget him. Because Pensacola's beauty and lure will be tied to his legacy forever.

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