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would enjoy this -
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BY NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN

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AUSTIN, TEX.--WHEN OUT-OF-TOWN POLITICAL REPORTERS COME TO THE STATE CAPITAL HERE, THE FIRST PLACE THEY VISIT FOR RELIABLE INFORMATION IS THE TEXAS OBSERVER.

THEIR STORIES FREQUENTLY OMIT GIVING THE SMALL CIRCULATION--13,500, STATEWIDE BIWEEKLY--CREDIT, BUT OVER ITS 17-YEAR-OLD HISTORY THE OBSERVER HAS BUILT A REPUTATION FOR SANE AND ACCURATE REPORTAGE.

UNTIL LAST YEAR THE OBSERVER ALWAYS LOST MONEY, AND PROBABLY STILL WOULD IF IT WEREN'T FOR A FEW PEOPLE LIKE BERNARD RAPAPORT. RAPAPORT, A WACO INSURANCE EXECUTIVE, FITS THE LOCAL STEREOTYPE IN BEING LOUD, HOSPITABLE AND AGGRESSIVE, BUT BEHIND THAT UNNERVING NATIVE FACADE THERE LIVES A THOUGHTFUL LIBERAL WHO HELPS THE OBSERVER BY BUYING THREE AND FOUR-PAGE ADS WHICH HE FILLS WITH TEXTS OF OUT-OF-STATE ARTICLES HE THINKS TEXANS OUGHT TO READ.

IF THE OBSERVER IS CHRONICALLY SHORT OF MONEY, IT'S HAD NO TROUBLE IN DEVELOPING SOME OF THE BEST JOURNALISTIC TALENT AROUND: RONNIE DUGGER, THE FOUNDER AND PUBLISHER LARRY KING, WILLIE MORRIS, ELROY BODE, LARRY GOODWYN AND BILL BRAMMER ARE A FEW OF THE BETTER KNOWN WRITERS WHO WORKED FOR THE PAPER AND MOVED ON BUT NOT OFF THE MASTHEAD.

THEY REMAIN AS CONTRIBUTING EDITORS, STILL WRITING OCCASIONAL PIECES FOR THE LOVE OF THIS ENDURINGLY HONEST SMALL-CHANGE PAPER IN BIG-BANKROLL TEXAS (SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE 7 DOLLARS; FROM 600 WEST 7TH ST., AUSTIN, 78701).

THE CURRENT EDITOR IS KAYE NORTHCOTT. SHE AND CO-EDITOR MOLLY IVINS STILL WORK MOSTLY FOR THE SATISFACTION OF DOING JOURNALISM RIGHT. LIKE THEIR PREDECESSORS THEY MUST MAKE IT AROUND TO COVER THIS ENORMOUS SOCIO-POLITICAL ENTITY BY STAYING OVERNIGHT IN THE SMALL-TOWN HOMES OF OBSERVER SUBSCRIBERS.

IT'S A FORM OF METHODIST CIRCUIT-RIDING JOURNALISM, AND NOT ANY EASY ONE TO PRACTICE WHEN THE PUBLISHER'S HOUSE RULE PROHIBITS ACCEPTING ANYTHING, NOT SO MUCH AS A CUP OF COFFEE.

THEY GET A 70-CENTS-A-MEAL EXPENSE ALLOWANCE. SUCH PROBITY IS ASTONISHING TO TEXAS POLITICIANS. HERE IN THIS STATE A FREE VACATION IN PUERTO VALLARTA ISN'T CONSIDERED A BRIBE BUT A CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION.

"YOUR HONEST STATE SENATORS HERE," EXPLAINED MOLLY IVINS, "ARE THE ONES WHO SELL OUT TO ONLY ONE INTEREST, SO THEY CAN VOTE STRAIGHT ON EVERYTHING ELSE." INDEED, TEXAS IS NOW GOING THROUGH WHAT WOULD BE AN ENORMOUS SCANDAL IN MOST PLACES. IN RETURN FOR IMMUNITY A SPECULATOR-SWINDLER OF THE SORT THIS PLACE THROWS UP EVERY FEW YEARS, HAS BEEN ON A WITNESS STAND IN DALLAS IMPLICATING POLITICIANS BY THE GROSS IN A BRIBERY-CONSPIRACY SCANDAL.

THE MARRIAGE OF POLITICS AND MONEY MAY NOT BE DIFFERENT HERE THAN IT IS IN MOST PLACES BUT IT'S CERTAINLY MORE OBVIOUS. THEY DON'T HIDE IT UNLESS IT'S ILLEGAL.

"JOHNSON IS THE GRANDDADDY OF USING PUBLIC OFFICE TO MAKE MONEY," REMARKS STATE REPRESENTATIVE FRANCES FARENTHOLD, ALLUDING TO THE WAY THAT OFFICE HOLDERS IN AUSTIN SEEM TO HAVE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES THAT PEOPLE NOT IN PUBLIC SERVICE SELDOM GET A CRACK AT.

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"THERE IS INCESSANT ADMIRING TALK ABOUT HOW THE PRESIDENT BEGAN LIFE AS SUCH A POOR BOY, AND HOW HE CAN NOW CLAIM WEALTH EQUAL TO HIS RANK. THE GOSSIP ABOUT HIM IS SO BLATANT BUT SO DETAILED . . . "

A PURPORTED 15 MILLION (M) DOLLAR TAX DEDUCTION ON HIS TRAVERTINE MARBLE SEPULCHRE CUM HISTORICAL FUN HOUSE CUM STORAGE BIN FOR THE 13 MILLION PIECES OF PAPER REPRESENTING THE BUREAUCRATIC REMAINS FROM HIS PRESIDENCY . . .

HIS CABLE TELEVISION SYSTEM . . .

HIS RUMORED IMPENDING PURCHASE OF THE TEXAS STATE RADIO NETWORK. BUT IT'S NOT HIM ALONE. THERE IS FORMER GOVERNOR, NOW SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY, JOHN CONNALLY'S PIECE OF THE WORLD OF ANIMALS EXHIBITION IN DALLAS; LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR BEN BARNES' HOUSEBOAT.

THE STORIES ARE ENDLESS. AND THOSE THEY ARE TOLD ABOUT SEEM TO BE INDIFFERENT TO THE APPEARANCE OF IMPROPRIETY, OR AT LEAST AN INORDINATE LOVE OF MONEY.

IF YOU CAN'T PROVE I DID SOMETHING WRONG IN A COURT OF LAW, I'M HAPPY TO HAVE YOU BRAG ABOUT ME. THE TRUE TEXAS RANGE WHERE THERE'S NARY A DROUGHT AND THE SUBSIDIES ALWAYS SHINE ARE THE LEAFY GREEN FIELDS OF AUSTIN ON WHICH LARGE HERDS OF UNBRANDED POLITICIANS GRAZE. THE JOB OF BRANDING THEM IS THE OBSERVER'S IN A STATE WITH A PRESS NOT KNOWN FOR INVESTIGATIVE ARDOR.

BUT IT'S A HARD JOB. POSITIVE PROOF IS DIFFICULT TO COME BY. SMART POLITICAINS TAKE THEIRS IN CASH OR IN DEALS OF UNTRACEABLE COMPLEXITY. AND EVEN THOUGH THE OBSERVER IS MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN ITS CIRCULATION FIGURES SUGGEST, IT MUST GET THE WRITERS DOWN AFTER A WHILE, ALWAYS PRINTING STUFF ABOUT THESE GUYS BUT SO SELDOM BEING ABLE TO NAIL THEM HARD ENOUGH TO MAKE A MATERIAL DIFFERENCE.

TO A DEGREE IT HAS GOTTEN TO EDITOR NORTHCOTT. "I CAN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER," SHE SAYS, "BY 1973 I HOPE I'LL BE WORKING IN VIDEO VIA CABLE DISTRIBUTION. YOU KNOW IT'S BASICALLY INSURGENT TO SHOW THOSE PEOPLE IN THE STATE'S LEGISLATURE."

NORTHCOTT AND HER COEDITOR MILLY IVINS ARE PHYSICAL AND TEMPERAMENTAL OPPOSITES, SHE BEING SMALL, ANGRY AND IMPATIENT AND IVINS BEING TALL AND ENDLESSLY GOOD AT THE SOFT TEXAS PALAVER WHICH IS SPOKEN BY MAKING EVERY OTHER VOWEL A DIPHTHONG. KAYE WENT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS WHERE SO MANY OF THE BIGGIES MAKE THEIR FIRST CONTACT WHILE MOLLY, THE DAUGHTER OF A MAJOR CORPORATION EXECUTIVE WENT TO A SEVEN SISTERS SCHOOL IN THE EAST AND THEN ON TO THE POLITICAL SCIENCE INSTITUTE IN PARIS.

"MOLLY WENT TO SCHOOL WITH EVERYBODY RICH AND I WENT TO SCHOOL WITH EVERYBODY POLITICAL," SAYS NORTHCOTT IN EXPLAINING HOW THEY GET INFORMATION BY COMING ON AS MISS HARD AND MISS SOFT. NEVERTHELESS, BEING WOMAN JOURNALISTS IN THE MACHO CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE CAN BE BOTH TRYING AND DEGRADING.

THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE, THEY POINT OUT, IS A PLACE WHERE THE BEAUTIFUL SECRETARIES WHO CAN'T TYPE ARE REFERRED TO AS "SWEAT HOGS."

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KAYE SAYS, "I CAN'T STAND TO BE PINCHED AND MANHANDLED OR HAVE THOSE CREEPY LEGISLATORS PUT AN ARM AROUND ME ANY MORE."

NO MATTER, THEY GET THE JOB DONE, KAYE BY FLINGLING AFFIDAVITS DOWN IN FRONT OF THEM AND CROSS-EXAMINING THEM; AND MOLLY BY TELLING THEM THAT HER DADDY WAS A KAPPA SIG, TOO! ISN'T THAT A WONDERFUL COINCIDENCE! IT'S THE HARD WAY TO PERFORM THE REPERTORIAL FUNCTION, BUT MOLLY ADDS, "AT LEAST NEITHER KAYE NOR I ARE EVER GOING TO BE ONE OF THE BOYS, THAT'S HAPPENED TO SO MANY OF THE MEN REPORTERS HERE. THEY GET SUCKED IN."

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MOLLY'S NOT LIFELESS, NOT BANGING DOWN THE HIGHWAYS IN HER YELLOW TOYOTA, TAKING GULPS OUT OF A BEER CAN. SHE LIKES IT ALL, THE MACHO, THE FANS CLAPPING, WHENEVER BEVOE, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS BULL MASCOT, DROPS HIS TEXAS-SIZED EXCRETA ON THE NON-BIODEGRADABLE ASTRO-TURF OF THE MEMORIAL STADIUM. IN HER OWN WAY SHE GOES FOR THE "HOOK 'EM HORNS" NUMBER AS MUCH AS THAT DETHRONED ELECTIVE TIBERIAS DOWN ON HIS RANCH 40 MILES FROM HERE.

BUT WHATEVER THE MOOD IN THE OBSERVER OFFICES, ANGER OR INDIGNANT SATISFACTION, THE PUBLICATION KEEPS COMING OUT WITH SERIOUS AND THOROUGH NEWS OF THIS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT STATE WHICH PEOPLE INSIDE AND OUT CAN'T GET ELSEWHERE.

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