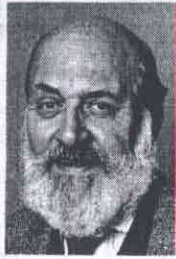


## Roy Meachum

11/23/87

### Another year



These columns started three years ago, on the Friday after Thanksgiving. The holiday came as early in 1984 as the law allows. At that time, my writing appeared on the opposite page, which was presided over by editor Carolyn Barranca, the lady who invited me to join the News-Post family.

I cannot begin to count the faces that have come and gone since first I began working for the Frederick newspapers, at the building on East Patrick Street and in the community. Carolyn is now a partner in the very successful Barranca Offutt Advertising Agency, to cite but one example.

Speaking of faces, I had no beard at the beginning. If that revelation surprises some readers, then their astonishment can be no greater than mine. I have no memory now of what it was like to shave every morning. In old, beardless days' pictures, my chin appears obscenely naked.

In those earliest months, I attempted to capture and express the great pleasure Sharon and I found with life and the people of Frederick. My first columns were a continuing celebration of this very special place. The response was marvelous. A number of readers told me they were collecting the pieces: Some were regularly clipped and mailed to former Fredericktonians, then living elsewhere.

During that first year, my wife insisted that we keep a personal collection. Rogers Office Supply was the source for scrapbooks that rapidly filled up. I began writing three times a week, dropped back to twice the second year, but for five months my columns appeared seven times each week. There followed a year of four weekly pieces, before settling back to the three, which was my original pace.

I have no idea how many words I have turned out for these pages since 1984. A rough calculation comes up well in excess of a half-million. Enough, that if assembled in a single volume they would rival "War and Peace" for bulk. So many, that early this year Sharon and I gave up entirely on running to Rogers for more scrapbooks. We no longer even try to clip columns on a regular basis.

Lying piled and scattered around my desk is the last batch before we stopped trying to keep up. I have scanned titles and topics, which span last fall's

elections through the move into this new old house in June. Frankly, I have been bemused to discover some of my thoughts from the past.

Although I have written that I reserve the right to disagree with anything I write, there is very little I would change. I don't mean mistakes. Whether a simple typographical error or a flaw in my logic, either can still bring a twist to my gut.

Some of my opinions have altered in these past three years, principally about people, especially politicians. They may be no different. I could have been wrong in those earlier judgements. On the other hand, I know I am not the same.

I hope I have grown in my under-

standing of the complexities of this city and county, of the world and of myself. I think I understand myself better than at any time in my long life. Most of all, the solitude demanded of writing columns requires a constant examination of myself.

I am haunted, always, by the fear that I may be deluding myself, and, in the process, deluding you about what I really think. My chief obsession has to do with honest thought; therein lies my only true responsibility to those who choose to invest their time in reading this column.

I cannot expect, and certainly don't demand, that anyone agree with anything I have to say. Conformity drives me crazy. At least, it bores me stiff. Friends contribute their differences to each other. This is the true strength in any friendship. When human beings try to be alike, they wind up either as competitors or as clones, but not friends.

It is true that sometimes I write to excite reaction. But the kind I hope for is new thoughts. I strive frequently to generate diversity, but I am looking for varying ideas. Not controversy.

It is not true that, at any time, have I sought to create controversy. I walk away from arguments. I am prepared at any time to discuss opposing views. And, if you don't know the difference, I can't explain.

In many ways, neither this column nor I live in the real world, although in my personal life I am much different, I am told, that some people assume I am from their readings of my words. As a

writer, I fight for ideas and ideals. As a man, I strive for serenity.

No, I am no pushover, but I have to be pushed before I push back. Sometimes Sharon becomes exasperated with my natural tendency to remain calm, even when provoked. However, my wife knows there is a line past which I can not be budged. On the wrong side of that line, I am more ferocious than most people, because I hate fights. I want them over as quickly as possible.

In this regard, it should be understood that I simply have no capacity for hating any other human being. Therefore, I have never understood why some people apparently hate me. I have learned to accept what cannot be changed. But I refuse to waste the substance of life in that most destructive of emotions.

Of course, I realize God has given me a great advantage over most people I know. My marriage to this red-headed Quaker lady endows my life with a completeness. I know no one I respect more than Sharon Delight Meachum. That statement will cause no astonishment to anyone who knows me, if only through these columns.

When you read these words, life will be in full-flow. They have been written in those pre-dawn hours, when the darkness outside my window receives only occasional distraction from flashing car lights.

Thank you for letting me share these thoughts. Thank you for the hundreds of considerations you have offered Sharon and me. Thank you for the past three years.