

FACELIFTING

'Enquirer': Violence Gets the Ax

By Malcolm Balfour

Reuter

LANTANA, Fla.—It used to tell how "Madman Cut Up His Date and Put Her Body in His Freezer." Readers turned the page and earned how "Mom Uses Son's Face for an Ashtray" or perhaps "Girl Friend Was Alive When He Cut Off Her Head."

Today, The National Enquirer, once the showcase of the bizarre, offers 32 pages of inspiration, emotional uplift, entertainment and practical advice on everything from how to combat loneliness to the avoidance of pneumonia.

Despite the current trend toward sex and violence The National Enquirer's 180-degree turnabout is increasing readership at a record-breaking rate. Since switching to respectability three years ago, the tabloid's circulation has tripled. It's now at 2.9 million—and rising.

The paper moved to this small South Florida town from Englewood Cliffs, N. J. in 1971.

Its pages feature stories with by-lines from senators, congressmen, surgeons and Hollywood celebrities—none of whom would have as much as answered an Enquirer telephone call a few years ago.

A regular contributor is the Rev. Billy Graham, who told Reuter "In my judgment, part of the success of The National Enquirer has been that there are millions of Americans who want clean accurate reporting—but who like to see it in headlines. The National Enquirer has filled a vacuum.

"It also carries a number of religious-oriented stories," Graham said "that I think have a tremendous appeal to people of all ages at this particular time of religious awakening in the country."

Publisher Generoso Pope

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Jr., 45, who personally checks every word appearing in his weekly paper, is the first to admit the road to respectability has been a rough one. A soft-spoken engineering graduate from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Pope worked a few years on the New York Italian language daily, *Il Progresso*, founded by his father.

"I guess printers ink was in my veins," he said. "I thought I knew all there

was to know about the business, so I borrowed the \$20,000 down payment to buy The Enquirer in 1952 for \$75,000.

He originally concentrated on gore stories, Pope says matter-of-factly, "because we were losing money, and I noticed how accidents always attracted large crowds. I decided if that's what interests people, that's what I'd give them. I had to attract readers some-

how."

By the mid-1960s the paper was turning a handsome profit, but circulation was stuck at just under a million. "We had saturated the gore market, and since this is a business, I knew we had to change," says Pope.

He shook his head slowly as he said, "Gosh, when I think of all the people we went through, I don't know how many there were. I'd hire writers and change them—all the time looking for the right formula."

Turnover was so high employees would joke about having to check names on intercom buttons to see if they still worked there.

Even Pope himself must be amazed at the success of his new look publication. It recently passed the Readers Digest in news stand and supermarket sales, and currently ranks second in this category behind TV Guide. Others in the top five are *Woman's Day*, *Family Circle* and *Playboy*. More than 90 per cent of The Enquirer's sales are over-the-counter.

It is one of the few publications that does not rely heavily on advertising for its income. Editors believe other publications like *Look* and *The Saturday Evening Post* mistakenly became pseudo-intellectual, catering to advertisers and losing sight of the key ingredient to any publication, the reader. Through national surveys and polls, The Enquirer has determined what subjects interest Middle America, and that's what is printed.

All advertising is unsolicited, and Pope refuses to

run more than 21 per cent advertising. "With the right editorial matter," says Pope, "advertisers will beat a path to your door." And they do.

Almost capturing a page out of the Stanley-Livingston era, Enquirer reporters find the entire world is their weekly beat. Two staffers spent most of July in Russia looking for human interest stories involving parapsychology, a favorite topic of Enquirer readers.

In recent months a reporter and photographer spent three weeks traveling through jungles in Peru on an animal cruelty story—at a cost of \$12,000. A reporter was sent to Singapore to find out how Hindus walk on burning coals without suffering pain.

Often stories are scrapped after spending as much as \$5000, Pope says, because they did not come up to his standards.

The Enquirer's monthly telephone bill averages \$25,000 covering the global beat.

To achieve "supermarket respectability," Pope decided to attract top newsmen, offering salaries ranging from \$20,000 for starting reporters to \$66,000 for top editors. His staff is among the best paid anywhere.

Even moonlighting reporters around the world earn \$10,000 a year and more, and several free-lancers top the \$20,000 figure. They're paid \$125-to-\$150 for simply submitting the facts in memo form. Enquirer writers then put articles into a simple punchy style. Clarity is a key word, and perhaps more than any publication in the nation The Enquirer has to be certain of its facts. That old image dies slowly.

The 41-year-old editor, Chrzan, says things are improving, but the old image is still around "until people pick us up and read us. Then they're hooked. Previously, I'd bring the paper home, and my wife wouldn't read it. She didn't want to see decapitated bodies."

A former city editor of The New York World Tele-

gram, Chrzan says his friends thought he was crazy joining The Enquirer. "But Gene said we were going to change our image, and the financial reward was greater.

"Coming home after my first day, I picked up the latest issue at a news stand to show my wife how we had toned down. The banner headline read 'Mom Bolls Baby and Eats It.' I thought, 'Oh my God, what have I done.'"

Chrzan points out that when The Enquirer first started its gradual change-over to respectability, it became the first large publication to campaign against pollution.

"Pollution Is Killing Us, and Its Almost Too Late to Do Anything About It," screamed a typical headline.

"Trouble is," says Chrzan "when we first ran those stories people would say, 'That's only The Enquirer with scare stories,' but they weren't."

An amazing 95 per cent of Pope's editorial staff made the move down to Lantana. Pope estimates their creativity has doubled since coming to Florida. "I realized that Metropolitan New York was becoming unlivable," he says.

"We couldn't function properly at Englewood Cliffs. The moment you walked in the door, you were mad at the world, and everybody was mad at everybody. Down here they come in relaxed and happy."

Pope's editorial staff is primarily British, although senior editors are American. Explaining, he says, "You still have mass circulation papers in England. Reporters know how to compete."

"They train journalists over there to look for different angles, which they don't do in this country. They don't train anybody here. In fact, they suppress anybody with ideas in the news media in this country."

Asked whether he had specific goals for his publication, Pope replied firmly: "Yes. I want a 20-million circulation in this country, which I regard as a very conservative figure. Next, I want to be the biggest publication in the world—with foreign language editions sold worldwide. I think the kind of material we're running now is appealing to people all over the world."