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CN&R
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**SECOND
& FLUME**

by **Melissa Daugherty**
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Sabbatical

Before I accepted the job of CN&R's editor-in-chief back in 2013, I sat down with my predecessor, Robert Speer, to get some advice.

At the time, I felt reasonably prepared for the job. I'd been with the paper for six years in a variety of roles, including news editor and managing editor, but I knew that the top position was different.

During our conversation, Bob acknowledged what I expected was the case—that the job entailed more work, more pressure, more visibility, more stress. He gave me several pointers, but one struck me. "Don't stay editor for more than five years," he said.

Well, that's oddly specific, I thought.

Bob had been the editor of at least two newspapers, including multiple stints at the CN&R. He knew how draining it was to pull off "the weekly miracle"—not only publishing a newspaper each Thursday, but also an award-winning one read by more than 100,000 people. What a grind.

At first I didn't think too much about that one particular piece of advice, but after a while, it became quite clear that Bob had the right idea.

When five years rolled around, I was overworked and exhausted. Being subjected to misogyny and the occasional death threat didn't help. Call me naive, but I didn't think being the first woman to lead the paper was that big of a deal in modern Butte County.

As if on cue, I started talking about taking a sabbatical—a break for a few months, or longer, to rest and regroup—but I kept putting it off because of big stories or projects.

And then, boom, along came Nov. 8, 2018. I put that plan on hold, indefinitely, to focus on the Camp Fire. The paper's collective effort covering the disaster is probably the most important journalism in my more than 20 years of reporting and editing. It also was the most personally challenging.

I didn't live in Paradise, so I didn't have to escape the flames. Figuratively speaking, however, the fire—from spending day after day on the Ridge—burned my ability to sleep, my focus and my remaining energy. Everything became more difficult to accomplish. Looking back, I really should've taken that sabbatical, but you know what they say about hindsight.

I'm what you might call a workaholic. It literally took a global pandemic for me to take a "break"—though I wouldn't call getting laid off restful or stress-free. I have my husband to thank for rescuing my family from financial ruin and allowing me to stay home with, and protect, our medically fragile child.

Which brings me to the here and now. I'm finally taking that leave.

Since the CN&R relaunched as a monthly in print, I've taken a back seat as editor-at-large. At first, I was editing quite a bit and writing editorials and this column. But as time marched on, I slowly pulled back.

That's only natural since the paper is under the leadership of a new editor. But part of it is due to frustration. Because the finances aren't sufficient for a return to weekly publication with buoyed staff, so many of the stories I view as critically important simply will never be written. That's been hard for me to accept.

Notwithstanding the fine work that the CN&R is still accomplishing, I haven't been able to turn off the editor within, the woman who thinks up story ideas while showering, running errands, you name it—who writes editorials in her head while cooking dinner.

My husband has caught me several times recently with a faraway look, then asked what I was thinking about. My answer: "Journalism." It's part of me, and maybe it always will be. My first byline appeared in a college newspaper 22 years ago, and I've been a newsie ever since. But for now, I'm choosing to disengage—to give myself that long-overdue break.

My hope is to come back refreshed and with clarity of how I might continue to be of service to our community. Until then, readers, be well. Take care of each other. And thanks for understanding.

Melissa Daugherty is editor-at-large for the Chico News & Review