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SECOND & FLUME

by **Melissa Daugherty**
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Thanks, Roger

Twenty years ago this month, I graduated from Chico State and started my first journalism job. It was an internship at the Enterprise-Record, where I joined a team of nine news reporters.

There was Ari, Eleanor, Greg, Heather, John, Larry, Laura, Michelle, and last, but not least, there was Roger—Roger Aylworth—the beloved Chico newspaperman and devout Mormon best known for his Sunday column that often chronicled life with his dear wife, the “saintly Susan,” and their seven “widgets.”

Roger died on April 11 at the age of 72, and this former colleague is processing the loss of this local icon.

I ended up working with Roger for four years, but neither of us expected that would be the case when I accepted what was supposed to be a short-term gig. Editor David Little typically didn't hire graduating seniors for summer internships. He liked the idea of students taking what they'd learned back to their campus newspaper, but I also suspect he would have hated to let go of a reporter in need of a job.

When he offered me the internship, David made a point of letting me know that, while he'd made an exception, I shouldn't expect a job at the end of the eight weeks. I told him I understood and was eager to live in the moment and gain real-world experience.

I already knew from reading bylines that there was very little turnover within the newsie ranks back in those days. Everyone was cordial to me, but I could tell that nobody planned on getting attached to someone arriving around Memorial Day and departing by early August.

Roger was among the most experienced of the group, then roughly 30 years in the business. He also was the most welcoming person in the newsroom, though he occasionally irked this fiercely independent young feminist.

This includes the time he chided me for wearing open-toed shoes, footwear wholly inappropriate for, say, covering a wildfire, he explained. See, Roger's dad instincts had kicked in around this newbie, and I didn't know him well enough to understand that what some might refer to as “mansplaining” today was his way of giving advice that came from a genuine place of care and concern.

My reaction was, shall we say, cool. Picture an annoyed teenager staring at her father with no emotion and no response. I don't think he expected that, and, to his credit, he changed his approach when imparting journalistic wisdom.

Roger was right about the open-toed shoes. I knew he was, which is why I stashed a pair of sneakers under my desk the very next day. (For the record, he would've preferred work boots.) I ended up using those shoes the next year, when I covered a wildfire in Cherokee.

Ultimately, I did well that summer. Eight weeks flew by and David and City Editor Steve Schoonover extended my internship. First to ten weeks, then twelve weeks, and so on. Then, one day, a reporter gave notice and I got a job offer. When I accepted, sweet Roger gave me the heartiest congrats.

By then, I'd grown to better tolerate his fatherly overtures, like not-so-subtly dissuading me from covering public safety issues (he'd seen things he couldn't forget, he warned).

Over the years that followed, Roger appeared psychic about certain things, like complimenting one of my stories when I was having a bad day and somehow knowing before even I did that I was getting a migraine. I came to truly appreciate him, but sadly, I'm not sure whether I ever explicitly told him so. Knowing Roger, though, he'd be the first person to let me off the hook. That's the kind of man he was. I'm thankful to have known him.

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