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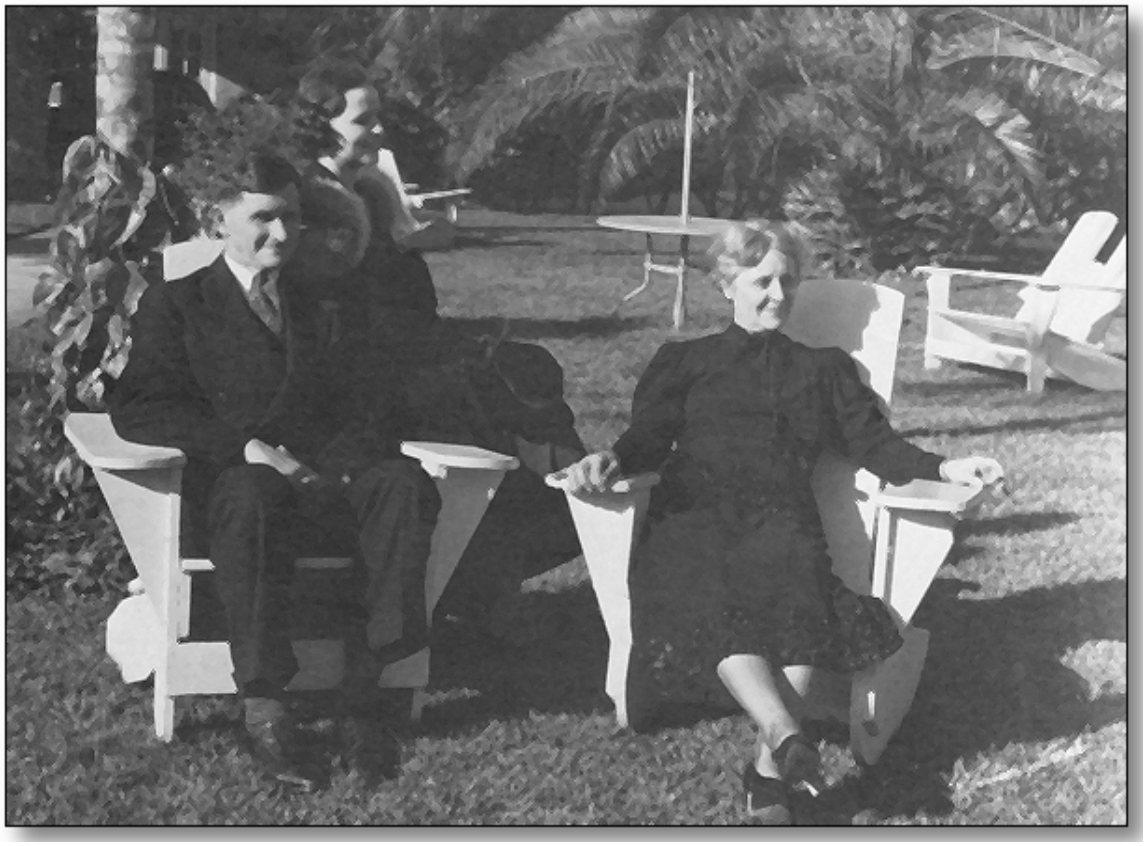
Lucy Fulghum O'Brien



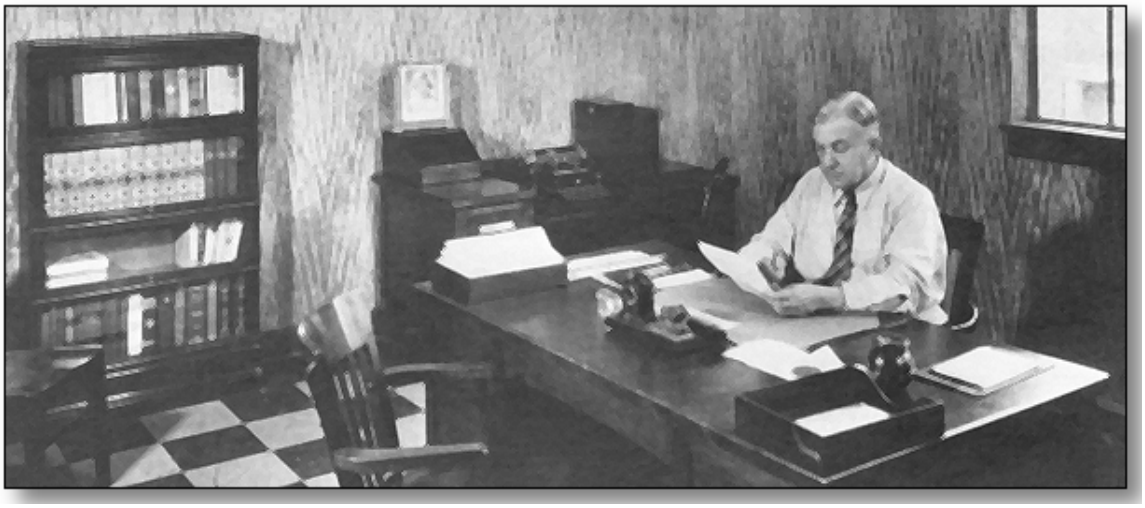
Lucy Fulghum, O'Brien during her first tour of duty at the Tribune with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Fulghum. in front of the Tampa Terrace Hotel where they lived.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

THE TRIBUNE'S FIRST WOMAN REPORTER

by Lucy Fulghum O'Brien

When I was graduated, as they phrased it in those language conscious days, in 1935, from Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee, Franklin Roosevelt was president, United States participation in World War II was still six years away, and we were not a very prosperous country. Money was particularly hard to come by in Florida, where the real estate collapse in 1925 preceded the Wall Street debacle of 1929. I came out of the auditorium into sunshine, the tassel of my mortar board having been turned by FSCW's legendary dean, William G. Dodd. The diploma I gripped said I now possessed a Bachelor of Arts with honors in journalism, but I had no idea how to use it to get a job. The thought of scouting a girls' school campus for prospective employees had crossed no corporation's mind. Consequently my outlook for economic independence was so gloomy that I, like the corporations, had tried not to think about it at all.



Edwin Lambright.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

True, a misguided school principal had offered me work as a teacher of exceptional children in a town near my home in Tampa, but I was endowed with none of the saint of the daily task qualities, and I fled in terror to Atlanta, where one of my friends had a job with the WPA art project. There, with an introduction from my brother-in-law, I presented myself to the ranking editor of the Atlanta *Constitution*. The interview consisted chiefly of the editor's lecture on the impropriety of women wanting to work for newspapers. "We took one on during the War," referring to the 1917-18 hostilities, "because of the manpower shortage, and haven't been able to get rid of her since." As I mentioned, this was the summer of 1935.

Concluding that my prospects at the *Constitution* were not good and being loathe to return to Tampa (heavens, who was there to marry in Tampa?), I compromised by acceding to my parents' wish that I take at least a brief business course. Once I learned the touch system and a scattering of shorthand, I became a secretary at Florida State Hospital in Chattahoochee, where an erstwhile roommate's father was superintendent and where several of us recent graduates congregated for wages of forty dollars a month, plus room and board in the rambling old frame house built by Andrew Jackson. During the working day, I sat behind a screen in the white male receiving ward, taking notes, while doctors made cursory mental and physical examinations of patients. Fascinating! And, by night all of us FSCW girls dated the unmarried doctors. This stint lasted six months, during which my mother did not get a wink of normal sleep, and having sowed enough career oats to see that my destiny did not lie in Chattahoochee, I decided to catch my breath at home. Within two weeks, I met an Irishman to whom I lost my heart utterly and forever.

Because abandoning Tampa thereafter was out of the question, and because it was obvious that Michael O'Brien, my future husband, was going to be a hard man to convince, I settled down to considering job possibilities. Citified office work? I preferred something a little more interesting. Along about August, my father, a likeable and otherwise straitlaced gentleman from Georgia who loved to play cards, mentioned that he could make an appointment for me with Ed

Lambright, editor of the Tampa *Tribune*. No telling how highly Daddy had recommended me during a poker game at the Elks Club.

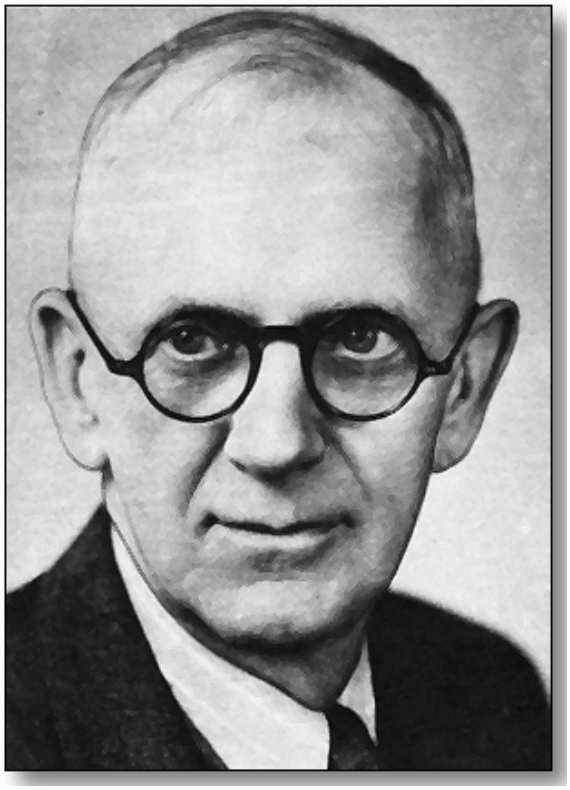
I do not know what I expected to come of it, but I accepted the suggestion, and attired myself in a brown dotted-Swiss dress with a white yoke and brown buttons from neckline to shoulders, a brown picture hat, and short white gloves. Despite my outfit, which was not unusual, Mr. Lambright was cordial. After a reasonable amount of conversation, he said: "Now you must meet the managing editor." That announcement gave me my first inkling that I was not talking to the person who did the actual hiring and firing of reporters. The innocent public always has had the delusion that whoever writes editorials is chief on any paper.

Mr. Lambright picked up his telephone. "Mr. Simpson, I'm sending you a young lady who wants a job. If she makes as good an impression on you as she has on me, I believe you'll hire her." I did not doubt it. From the moment I walked into that wonderful, air-conditioned, art deco *Tribune* building, which architect Franklin Adams had remodeled from the old R. S. Evans used car emporium on Lafayette at Morgan Streets, I felt as Eve must have when she awoke alive and well in Eden. It did not occur to me that the *Tribune* had never put a woman on permanent assignment in its newsroom before. Later I learned – from the lady herself – that publisher S. E. Thomason's daughter, Elizabeth Thomason Griffin (of the Exchange Bank Griffin family), had once done temporary duty for several weeks; but publishers' daughters are not typical hired hands and therefore do not count. For different reasons, society editors do not count either.

I walked out of the editor's office, past Mrs. Darby on the switchboard, past society, sports, and cartoonist George White's art departments, and into the presence of R. W. Simpson, generally referred to as the "Deacon." He was a tall, thin, gray man with a pursed mouth and years of Associated Press rectitude in his demeanor, a tyrant who made grown men suffer for their journalistic sins. He was also on exceedingly good terms with Charlie Wall, boss of Tampa's nationally feared gambling establishment and cousin to all of Tampa's more respectable Walls, including the Postmaster. Charlie was a good source, and news being news, the "Deacon" preferred to get it right. He also preferred everyone else to get it right, and woe to the reporter who forgot that audience is (or was) a singular noun. The sound of his footstep, the brief harrumph that signalled his approach, cast fear in the fingers on every typewriter keyboard.

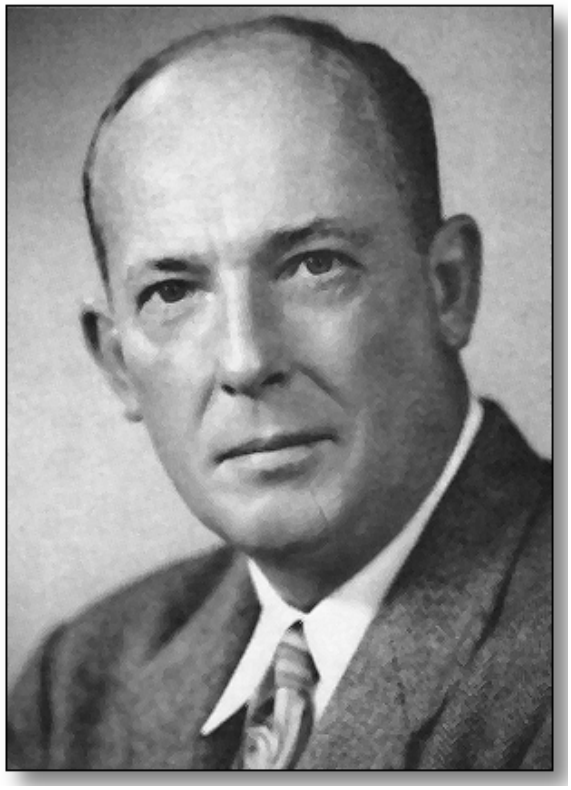
I did not actually know these facts of *Tribune* life, but I sensed them. When the "Deacon" concluded our visit by telling me to go home, write something, and let him have a look at it, I did not make a nuisance of myself by asking what *kind* of something. I remembered a tale my husband had told me of a Notre Dame English examination that asked: "Write anything about anything." Cogitate as I would, I could come up with nothing suitable but to revise an article on occupational therapy which I had done (while at Chattahoochee) for the state social workers' journal. Fortunately the public library had a copy. I took a new version to the "Deacon's" office, dropped it on his desk, and departed without interrupting his telephone conversation, a professional maneuver arrived at by instinct.

Sunday morning found me with the thimbleful of fleeting fame which comes from being published in a newspaper. Better yet, the "Deacon" soon called to say he had a six-weeks' opening for an extra hand in putting out the "mailaway." This has become the more popular and



R. W. Simpson, "The Deacon," was a stickler for grammar.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.



Red Newton.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

profitable Gasparilla edition, which not only is ordered by Tampans but also by tourists at the pirates' annual celebrations in February. In 1936, it appeared in October, a launchpad for the season whose weather lured Americans to the land of sunshine and Vitamin C. (Hookworm, maybe, but no scurvy in these parts.) Pictures and copy concerned Florida's sixty-seven counties with special emphasis on the *Tribune's* circulation area from Gainesville to Fort Myers. Most of the stories were rehashed from Allen Morris's series of Florida *Handbooks*, Kim's *Guide to Florida*, and as many chamber of commerce bulletins as were available. The experience was a good indoctrination into the geography, tourist attractions, and industries of my state, but it took years to overcome what the chamber of commerce sheaves did to my integrity, suffusing me, as they did, with the idea that anything worthy of being put into print must necessarily be wonderful.

Although the "Deacon" had committed himself to six weeks only, I was sure he would not let me go when that time ended. So sure, in fact, that on my first Thursday (the *Tribune's* payday), I went down to Adams-Magnon Jewelry Company on Franklin Street and let Miss Ruth Coile, also known as "Sweetie," sign me up on a three dollar down, three dollar a week contract for a sixty dollar bracelet. Simple arithmetic testifies to my optimism, and the fact that one of my

daughters (later a *Tribune* staff writer herself and now married to a Miami *Herald* editor) still wears the bracelet, proves my optimism was well-founded.

Just what premise it grew from is another question. I did not know enough to realize that in the manual typewriter era journalists did not bother to erase errors. "What do you think the letter X is on the typewriter for?" inquired Pete Norton, the sports editor whose desk I used until he came in at two o'clock in the afternoon. Pete also was the first to explain to me that type was not made of rubber and that my headlines would bounce (the way an overdrawn check bounces) right back from the composing room, if I had put in so much as one letter too many. All of this will seem cave art to today's reporters who write their stories in computers and collect hot type as an antiquity.

George K. End at Rattlesnake, Florida.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

As for emerging from the newsroom to get a story off the street, I had no notion of how to do it. In college my journalism professor, a one-man department named Earl Lynn Vance (the best teacher I ever had anywhere, except Ruth Carrell Johnson, who taught Latin at Plant High School), thought what we needed to learn in a liberal arts college was how to think straight, and that we could pick up the practicalities of journalism elsewhere. He was a non-conformist who would not take his Ph.D., who had worked for the *New York Times*, and who needled the faculty into thinking straight as regularly as he needled his students. Once each year his classes composed a mock edition of the Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, and for weeks ahead we knew what our assignments were to be. Mine, as a Tampa girl, was to interview the governor's wife, Mrs. Doyle Carlton, also a Tampan. I could not get up nerve to telephone her, since I had no clue as to what to say should she answer, and eventually took the risk of knocking on the Mansion's big front door. When there was no immediate response, I gave up the assignment as futile. Mr. Vance subsequently ran me for editor of the *Distaff*, the FSCW literary magazine, for which I wrote courageous think pieces about the possibility of war and the improbability of God, but did not have to interview Mrs. Carlton.

Ill-equipped as I was to become the *Tribune's* first woman news reporter, I did have a few things going for me. As best I can remember, forty-five years later, these were: exceptionally good health, even for a chit of twenty-two; the ability to change my own typewriter ribbons; an instinct for when to consult the dictionary; no romantic hankering for anyone in the newsroom –

or anywhere in the universe, except some law offices across Morgan Street in the Stovall Professional Building. Probably best of all, I was not demanding about money. When Red Newton (that is V. M. Newton, Jr., the "right-to-know" crusader) took me to the *Tribune* library to tell me in privacy (salaries were always secret) that I was hired and would be paid fifteen dollars a week, three dollars more than cigar workers or sales girls at Maas Brothers, I assured him that I would be glad to forego salary until I proved myself. He refused, but from that day forward knew me for a patsy who really would have worked for nothing.

My first on-the-job story (assembled from clippings) concerned George K. End, then living in Arcadia and widely known as the canner of rattlesnake meat. He was first cousin, I wrote with tongue-in-cheek, to the man who met the wolf at the door and got a fur coat in the process, except this Arcadia fellow caught snakes in the grass and served them for supper. End and his sons later set up a rattlesnake farm as a tourist attraction on the Tampa side of Gandy Bridge; he also obtained a Rattlesnake, Florida, post office there, cancellations from which are now desirable since the post office did not long survive. George, who forgot to keep enough antitoxin on hand, once did not make it to Davis Islands Hospital, once being enough for that particular shortfall.

The city desk, satisfied with my George End lead (or, as you might say, the Beginning of my End), sent me to Hillsborough River State Park, then in its preliminary stages of development. Not exactly hard news, but it was an unnerving first time out for me. Fortunately Roscoe Frey, the photographer who had the face of an Indian and a shoulder that sagged from the weight of his Speed Graphic, was sent along also. Roscoe asked all the right questions, and I merely wrote the story I had heard him gather. Having observed that what I needed to do was unbridle my curiosity, I never had trouble with questions thereafter.

Gradually, from my colleagues at the *Tribune*, I learned the elemental skills of our trade. Jock Murray, who did the first investigative reporting on the lowgrade Florida school system, advised me that it took only 800 words, or about two-and-a-half double-spaced pages, to tell the story of Creation. Paul Wilder and James Clendinen, both imported (as Milton Plumb was later) from the Clearwater *Sun* around the time I came to the news room, showed me that newcomers, if talented, could out-write their elders. Bill Abbott shepherded me through a day at the national convention of the American Federation of Labor, held in the buff brick city auditorium adjacent to the Tampa Bay Hotel. Dozens of national reporters were in attendance, including May Craig, the American Gothic newswoman who even then was asking the same plague-take-it questions she put to John F. Kennedy.

It was the city desk men who wound me up and set me going. At first, they challenged my capacities by asking me to type Garden Club and Girl Scout notes, which were brought in handwritten. Among the Girl Scouts of those days were Oraleaze Bohich and Fruitilla Kitchens. Who could forget them? The desk also had other ambitions for me. Harry Schaden, the ten to six city editor, was a Brooks Brothers, tweedy type, complete with pipe, who eventually became an account executive for a New York advertising agency. His notion was that I should back him up in setting intellectual and aesthetic standards for *Tribune* coverage. As his stand-in music critic, I, soul sister to the crows, was an edge disappointing. One night when he sent me to Arthur Rubenstein's violin concert in the Palm Room of the Tampa Terrace Hotel, I wrote the story

A postcard of the U.S. Post Office at Rattlesnake, Florida.

Photograph courtesy of Hampton Dunn.

three times without getting it to his satisfaction. He also disapproved of the hour of my morning arrival, which was eleven-thirty-five. I never minded working late, but my heart scarcely beats before noon. It was my father's opinion that if I had not got a job on a morning paper, night-watching would have been the only employment open to me.

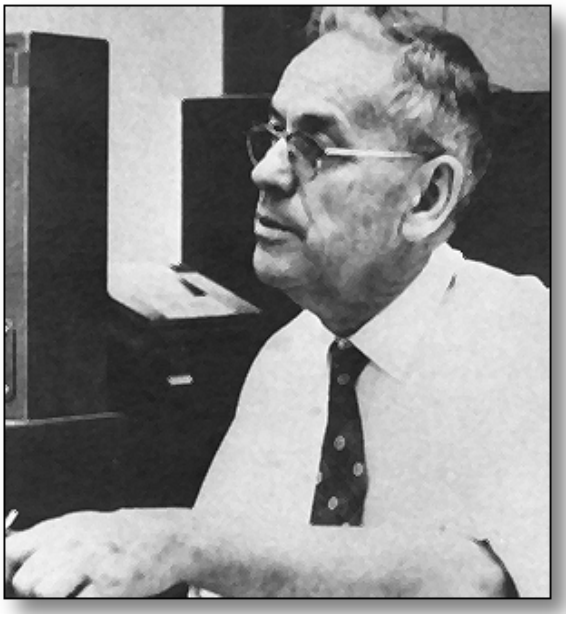
Red Newton, a warrior sprung full grown from dragon teeth sown* on the Tampa *Times* and the Tampa *Tribune* sports desk, handed me a sheet of copy paper, that lovely commodity cut from tag ends of newsprint rolls, and said: "Miss Fulghum, put some sex appeal in this." "This" was a list of new YMCA officers, whose names he had just taken over the phone. I tried. When he sent me to do a feature on the Florida State Fair, I tried even harder. "Look at all the people around you," Red admonished. "Remember that every one of them is a *Tribune* reader." The whole, dusty lot of them. What Red meant was that he expected a female reporter's stories to entice the reader's interest with come-hither facts told in language that could be understood by every man, woman and child on the roller coaster. He was a terrible chauvinist. He armed his men with hatchets, teaching them that the downward glance was the only one a politician merited. From me, he wanted the woman's angle and human interest.

In pre-World War II days, before the five-day work week and social security, all of us put in a

* By some modern day Cadmus. See Bulfinch's *Age of Fable*.

Roscoe Frey, longtime Tampa Tribune photographer, c. 1940.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.



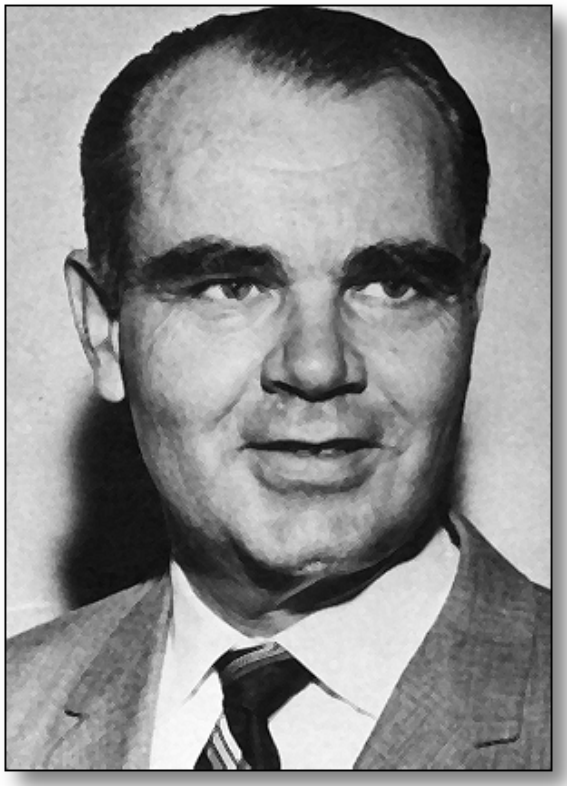
Jock Murray.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

six-day effort, sometimes dropping in on the seventh to see if we could be helpful. During *my* six I wrote a Sunday fashion page under the name of Julie Dale (the "Deacon" did not believe in force-feeding our egos, because we might be hard to handle if we thought we were indispensable); movie reviews under the name of Ruth Alden; an anonymous radio log; and, briefly, a food column under the name of Hester Hale. I was relieved of this last assignment after three days, having immediately exposed what has happily proved to be a lifelong unfamiliarity with the kitchen.

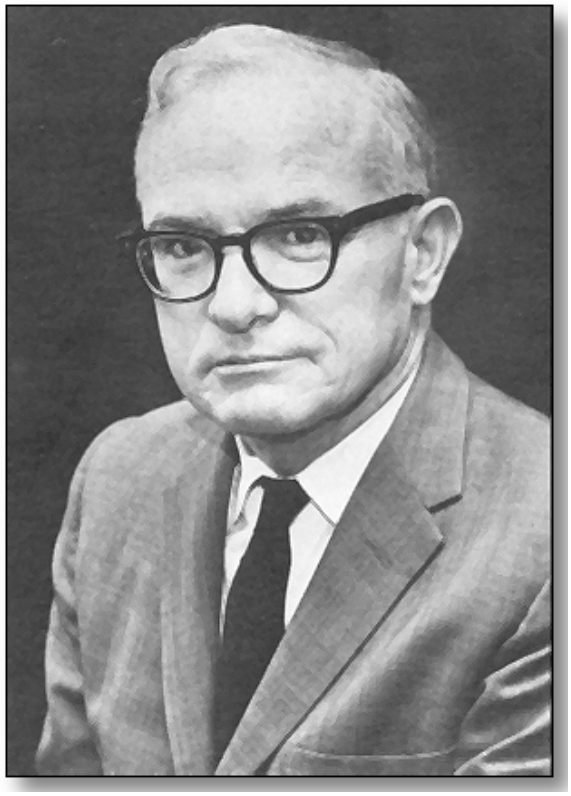
Sometime during those first years, I was actually given a desk. I never quite made it to mileage for the daily use of my parents' ear, but I did get a desk. The instant I saw a new one being hauled in, I joyously assumed that the *Tribune* had at last earned enough money to buy a piece of furniture just for me. I could not have been more mistaken. The desk was for an alien, a man being sent in from our publisher's Chicago paper, the *Sun-Times*. I was furious. Instead of quitting,* which occurred to me, I marched uninvited to the "Deacon's" office and announced there was something I needed. The fright on his face could mean only one thing. He thought I was asking for a raise. Since I already had reached $25 a week, I scorned his low-mindedness. "What I need," I told him in no uncertain terms, "is a desk." It came the next day, smaller than all the others, and drifted about the newsroom for many years, occupied by one hapless reporter after another. While I sat behind it, there were moments when my ashtray slid off, setting fire to

*Quitting was not in vogue during the depression. From 1936 to 1941, my first *Tribune* tour, no one quit and no one was fired, not even our Communist wire editor, who was teased mercilessly, but nothing more.



Paul Wilder empathized with everything and everybody.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.



James A. Clendinen.

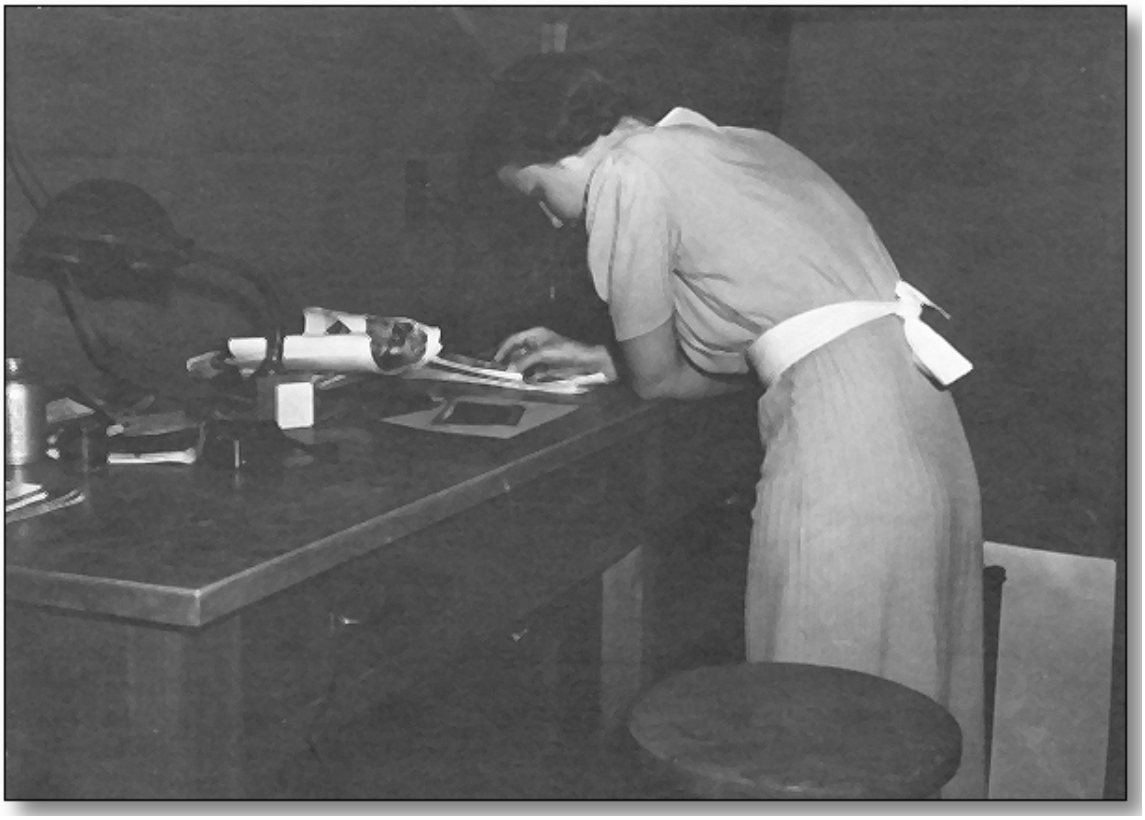
Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

my trash basket, and even twice when, in rapt absorption, I pounded my old Underwood so fiercely that it, too, fell to the floor.

I once calculated that my average daily output during that period was 2,000 words. It took better than two hours just to type them, two or three to gather the facts, and five to get the leads right. I was awestruck by Paul Wilder who often could begin at the beginning and go straight through, without a typo.

Most of the stories I was assigned to were routine, or worse, hackneyed. I remember a few others: a United Daughters of the Confederacy meeting on the anniversary of the firing on Fort Sumter; a surgeons' convention, at which the new hip-pinning was described; an interview with Dr. Mason Smith, Tampa's first psychiatrist, on shock therapy; an eve-of-War talk with Dr. Schick, inventor of the Schick test for diphtheria, who said he would have killed himself, as did other Viennese Jewish doctors, had he not come to this country; and a visit with a lady who had just undergone surgery for the removal of a third breast under her left arm.

However, one of the heroines I remember best was "Little Hope." The *Tribune* for several weeks had been running an abundance of photographs and stories about a blonde youngster who



Lucy Fulghum O'Brien checking points in Roscoe Frey's darkroom, c. 1939.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

not only was an orphan but who also had been crippled since birth – and likely would have remained so had not a wise, generous man given money for corrective surgery, recently performed at a hospital south of Tampa. Unbeknownst to the rest of the world, but fully understood by all of us in the newsroom, was the fact that this great benefactor, this Solomon of Solomons, was none other than our publisher, S. E. Thomason himself. The story of Little Hope had been told and retold by the *Tribune's* brightest and best, until half the surrounding population was ready to adopt the tyke whether her surgery was successful or not. The operation was successful, lucky parents had been chosen, and on a Saturday afternoon she was to go to her new home, accompanied by *Tribune* staff, of course. We must have been shorthanded because I, who had never written a Little Hope story so far, was chosen for the climactic event. At 9 o'clock that night the O'Brien took me downtown to see my first Page One story, hot off the press. Once not being nearly enough for that sort of gratification, I rose next morning to admire the Sunday paper again. Curses! Red (who would have to give back his Pulitzer; I would insist on it) had thought better of my lead and had rewritten it to include a prayer he said Little Hope had prayed when her new parents tucked her into her new bed. Not a word of my original version remained on Page One, appearing only after the reader turned to the jump. To give Red his due, many subscribers wrote in to say the prayer had made them cry.

Mike and Lucy O'Brien in a picture made at the Pentagon photo lab during World War U.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

Hard though it may be to believe, the O'Brien married me despite this disgrace. The great

event took place in September 1941, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, where Mike's old English teacher John F. O'Hara (later a Cardinal) was stationed as Bishop of the Army and Navy. In December came Pearl Harbor. Mike did his World War II bit in Charleston, South Carolina, as executive officer of the Section Base, whose small craft swept the harbor for mines, and later as Personnel officer of the Navy Yard. We both did a little magazine writing, and I learned how to tailor Red Cross bathrobes for soldiers and sailors overseas. (What lengths one will go to for the Admiral's wife in wartime!) As for newspapering, I never read Charleston's *News* and *Courier* except on special occasions, such as the atom-bombing of Hiroshima. To tell the truth, I do not care much for newspapers except when I am working for them, on which occasions I wake from a sound sleep and my feet hit the floor the instant the paper has been delivered.

When Mike and I came back to Tampa in 1946, my longings for my *Tribune* past ran silent and deep. These surfaced as I accompanied a friend to break her engagement news to the press, and Paul Wilder caught sight of me in the society department. He stood stock still at the doorway. "Why don't you come back to work?" he inquired. Foolish questions get foolish answers. "Why doesn't someone ask me," I replied. Red had succeeded the "Deacon" as managing editor. He had Paul call, Red and I talked, and within days I received a letter confirming our agreement for my reemployment at a stipend of $50 a week. Elation kept me pounding the pillows. When I asked permission of the O'Brien, who disapproved of sedatives, to take a sleeping pill, he said if I did not he would have to.

War had brought many changes to the newsroom. Harry Schaden had gone into New York advertising, and Bill Abbott, after a taste of Air Force Intelligence, decided he would rather see the world in peacetime also. Jock Murray, the *Tribune's* old faithful, and Harold Tyler, a newcomer from Atlanta and Detroit, now ran the city desk. Several women had worked in the newsroom during my absence. Two of these were Gloria Cermak, who later was obituary editor for the New York *Times* (an excellent job, something like writing *Profiles* for the *New Yorker*), and Barbara Harrison, who married Jimmy Clendinen and thereby became one of the ranking *Tribune* wives. I confess to unworthy twinges of "What were they doing in my bailiwick?"

The powers, as usual, had deadly duties in store for me, the chief being to handle (that is, to edit, write headlines for, etc.) all the social notes that came in from the circulation area from as far as Alachua County on the north and Lee on the south. How abysmally boring this was can be fathomed when I relate that during the war, the *Tribune* had seen it as its patriotic duty to run photographs not only of the bride, but also of the bridegroom, often in uniform, cutting their wedding cake.

This fearful monotony presented me with three kinds of problems: physical, aesthetic and moral. It was out of the question to display the cake-cutting ritual in a one-column cut, and since marriages are epidemic year-round, being especially virulent in June and December, there was not enough space. *Tribune* inside pages were ugly at best, staggering advertising up both sides and leaving a kite and kite tail effect for news displays. Trying to get the cakecuttings into the kite tails was frustrating. Neither were the visual effects enhanced by the snapshots which graded from poor to awful.

Lucy O'Brien during her second tour at the Tribune when she walked to work from her thirteenth floor apartment at the Tampa Terrace Hotel.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

My journalistic ethics required that a story, even a wedding, be printed the morning after it occurred. If weddings were worthy of more space than we gave divorces (that is, a line or two of type, set in agate, in the "News of Record"), then they deserved more than the laggard pace they were keeping. One stringer actually sent in a week old account with a fascinating last line: "Unfortunately the bridegroom went rowing on the lake during the afternoon's festivities, and was drowned." She was slow in getting the copy to us, she explained, because she had to wait for the cake-cutting photograph.

"Red," I said, (I was on much more comfortable terms with him than I had been with the "Deacon") "we ought not to give credit lines for wedding photographs unless our own men take them. Why should a commercial photographer get twelve square inches of advertising space for the cost of an out-of-focus glossy?" Red, who resented any infringement on freedom of the press, agreed, and with credit lines gone, the flow of pictures diminished.

My distress was further eased by the fact that despite my being the handy girl of the state desk, the city desk also called on me. Actually, my second *Tribune* tour brought me freedom and

maturity as a writer. Whenever I was pulled off the "state soc" chore, it was to do a story of broad readership. One weekend I had three on Page 1 (my record), the best of these being a suit Clifford MacDonald (owner of the printing company and founder of the training center for the retarded) brought against Daphne du Maurier for having stolen *Rebecca* from a novel, *Blind Windows*, written in the 1920s by his mother. He did not win, but it was a good story.

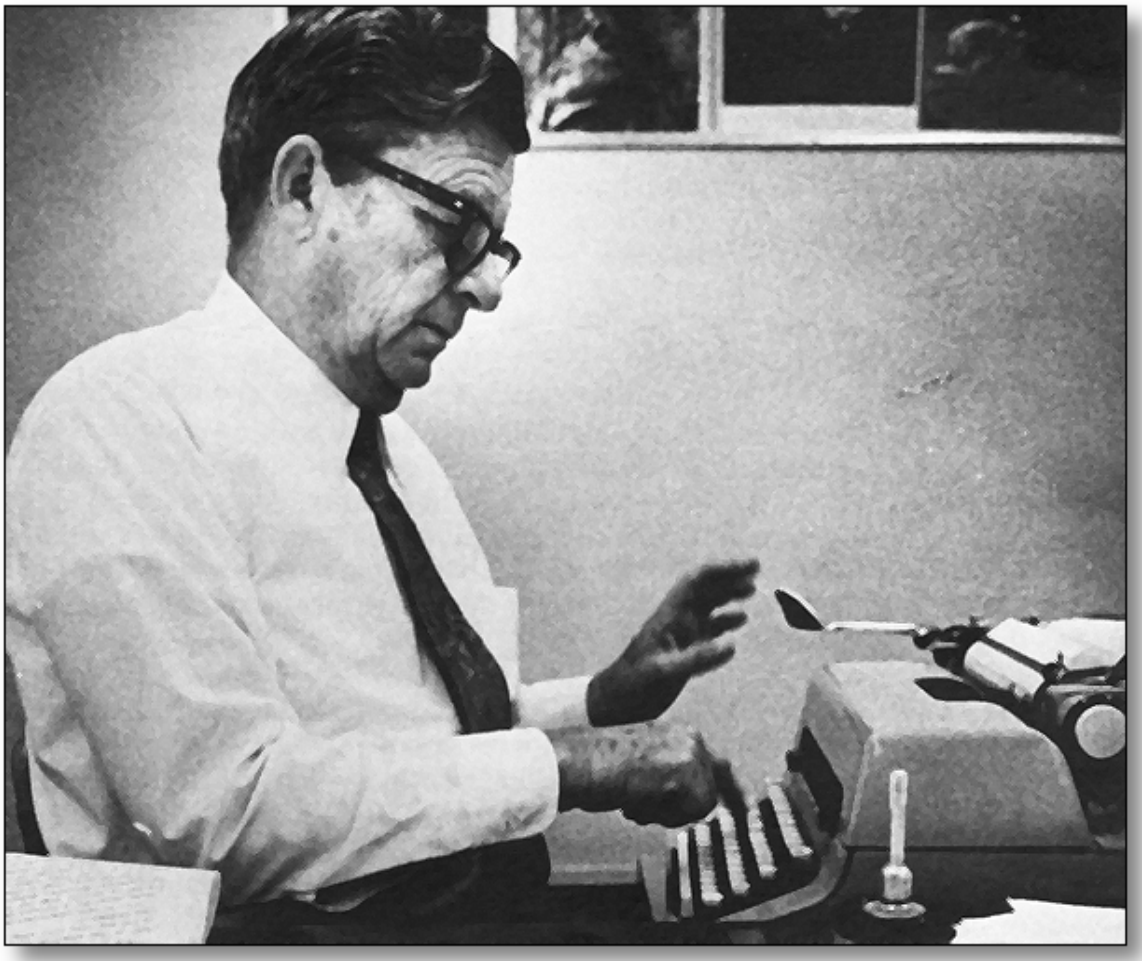
Also great fun were out of town junkets, such as the expedition Jimmy Clendinen, Jock Murray, Paul Wilder, and photographer Dan Fager and I made to Tallahassee to inaugurate Fuller Warren (the *Tribune* definitely had not tried to elect him, but gave him a two-day ceasefire for the inauguration), and the only search and destroy mission Red ever sent me on: a trip to audit the sex education classes at Florida State University (FSCW had undergone a sex change, and now was coeducational). What Red was looking for was Page One dynamite to rouse the rabble. Instead I came back with stories so complimentary that a priest at Sacred Heart (across from the downtown Tampa post office) considered sermonizing against them.

It was only in editing, not in writing, that I went for the jugular. Moreover, I was ideally content with my human interest beat. I did not get the gang killings. I was sent to the house to drink Spanish tea with the victim's wife, and to have my hair done by his beauty parlor girl friend. If a lad hanged himself in jail, I did not get the hanging. I got the trip to his neighborhood and school to see what his life had been like, and to the funeral, to see how his mother took it. If a supermarket bag boy was killed in a midnight ride, I got the interview with his mother, heard her tell how bloody the car seat was, observed the mentally retarded sister, and the poverty of their home life. Sobsistering, some call it, but Meyer Berger, of the New York *Times*, gave me a first for "spot news" (in a Florida woman's press club competition) for the bag boy story.

My second tour at the *Tribune* wound up when I became regularly too queasy to sit around patiently in front of a typewriter. Pregnancy was the cause of this *malaise*, a shocker to me who had been married and childless for eight years. I turned in my press card and opted for motherhood. Michaela O'Brien, named for her father, was born in January 1950, and was followed two and a half years later by Kathleen, named for her father's first grade sweetheart who had smelled deliciously of talcum at dancing school.

Child rearing cut short what, in retrospect, may have been the most valuable reporting I ever did for the *Tribune*. The series ran for approximately thirty weeks as the Saturday installment of my six-day a week *Woman's World* column. Despite its title, the column featured nothing but men who were chosen by Red from the economic and political power structures of Florida's West Coast. There were bank and utility company presidents, cigar, citrus, shipping, cattle and sponge industry kings, doctors, lawyers and merchants. Each story took up a quarter page (when papers were wider, and type more densely set) and was based on the same sixty questions, prescribed by Red before the series began.

By 1955, Red thought I was ready to come out of retirement. "You have a husband, a house, and two children," he explained, "So now you are womanwise enough to take over the society department." I would do no such thing. He called in some of my buddies to persuade me. "What about this?" he asked. "Mrs. O'Brien doesn't want to go back into society." "Go back into society? I've never been in there in my life." But the cause, after nearly twenty years, obviously



W. P. Dozier.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

was lost. To Red, a woman was a woman wherever she sat. Besides, he lured me with sugar-plum talk of how I could make the department into anything I pleased.

There recently had been a poll which put weddings and engagements in the low five percent of reader interest, and since this had always been my view, he regarded me as in tune with the future. He gave three warnings!

First, "I don't care if you don't do a lick of work," he said. "Just see that it gets done." I proceeded to put in a fifty hour week, being confident that change would never be accomplished if I did not show the seven girls in my charge how.

Next, "Remember you're the boss. You're old enough to be some of those girls' mother." I was a year *older* than *one* of the mothers, but I am a disorganized democrat, inclined to fraternize with Indians.

Ann McDuffie, long time *Tribune* food editor, started at the *Times* and has the longest continuous record of service of any Tampa newswoman.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

Finally, "Don't make changes too fast. Readers hate to give up anything they're accustomed to." He was whistling in the wind. I have been known to make the post office open up on Labor Day so that I could mail a Christmas package.

I started on a three year rampage which, miraculously, both the *Tribune* and I survived. The thing to go immediately was Society as the section title. I settled for *Women in the News* because the Miami *Herald* and other Knight papers had preempted *For and About Women*, a more inclusive phrase. Actually I wanted *Infinite Variety*, as in Shakespeare's tribute to Cleopatra: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety," but realized I would be laughed out of the newsroom if I suggested it. Bill Dozier, a post-World War II wire editor (not the Communist one) and unofficial editor of the bulletin board (where Miscreants were put in stock, just above the pencil sharpener) would have led the jeering section.

John C. (Jim) Council was one of the few circulation managers in the country who could make circulation pay. He ultimately became general manager and publisher.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

Next I took aim at the chitchat column. "Let's call it *About People*," I said, having in mind the items *Time* uses in its *People* pages. The society editor agreed to the title change but clung to her traditional inanities. She was so unyielding and in such good standing with the conservative publisher that I looked for cooperation elsewhere.

Ann McDuffie gave it to me in a Sunday fashion piece called *The Personal Appearance Of* (borrowing a title I used in the 1930s on the Julie Dale fashion page) which featured well-dressed townswomen. Helen Foreman had a Monday feature called *They Are Sisters*, which turned up surprising relationships long buried under married names. Monica Sherman matched wits when she wrote headlines for early Ann Landers columns, Panky Glamsch brought her Tampa *Times* newsroom techniques to reporting, and still others went to the composing room to supervise changes our layouts underwent in editions for different parts of the state. We finally achieved indented columns with no division rules to air out the pages. We used wire stories ("What do you mean you let the woman's page have it?" Red, who had been out of town, once roared. "Don't you know we're the only paper in the country that didn't put Grace Kelly's wedding out front?"). We sometimes even lucked into ways of getting our own coverage of the Paris fashion openings.

The Woman's Editor's desk as it looked from 1955 to 1958.

Photograph courtesy of L. F. O'Brien.

When I lunged ahead too rapidly with alterations in wedding and engagement styles, however, cries of outrage could be heard from Golf View, Palma Ceia, Hyde Park and Davis Islands, all the way to the office of our publisher in residence, Jimmy Council. (Ownership hung out in Richmond.) No protests were heard from little people all over the rest of our circulation area, for now *no one* got more than a one column cut, unless she was old T. C. Taliaferro's granddaughter, marrying one of the sure-enough Rothchilds, in which case we requested an eight column strip through Associated Press wirephoto services in Paris. Instead of full sentence headlines, we introduced last-names-only captions for weddings and engagements, thus eliminating the torturous search for synonyms for Betrothed, Affianced, and Engaged. Wedding details were restricted, and nobody, but nobody, could have a picture unless it arrived in time to use the morning after.

All this slashing and cutting so angered the uppercrust that they took all their nuptial news first to the *Times* (the *Tribune* soon bought the *Times*), but it also released the Sunday cover for other stories. We began to pour picture layouts into it. When a really marvelous picture came along, we gave it the full eight columns. One of these was Roscoe Frey's arrangement of Seven Great West Coast Beauties, on the stairway of the Alonzo Clewis house (burned, alas!) on Bayshore Boulevard. Another fine picture was made by Bruce Roberts from inside a department store

window, unseen by the little girl who pressed her face against the glass gazing at Christmas dolls.

In our efforts to jazz up women's news, we occasionally lit fires too hot to handle. One was my revival of Lucille Trice Knauf's *Lotta Chatter* column of the 1920s. In its new incarnation, it read more like Walter Winchell, with Ann McDuffie, a fine gatherer of gossip, playing Walter. Three mistakes, one involving the Gasparilla Krewe, and we were cancelled.

Another effort in which we were curtailed was Ann Waldron's series on her own pregnancy. Ann, the best woman writer I ever worked with, and her husband, Martin, then our Tallahassee bureau chief and later the New York *Times* man in the New Jersey state house, were having the third of their four babies. Red decided that just before the baby was born we would begin doing stories on her pregnancy and delivery to run on Page One. In the 1950s such material was heady stuff and did not appear on family television sets, as it does nowadays. The series, tepid today, was torrid for its time and irreverently funny. However, there were more outcries from the prurient (none of whom got into this world by any other process). When Red called me in to tell me that as soon as we could get the baby born, the publisher said we must cancel, I stuck out my hand. "Congratulations. We got away with murder." He sucked in the corners of his mouth gleefully.

One by one, a few blows for women were struck, yet at the same time I was holding back the forward movement of ladies of the press. My husband and my parents before him, who made me financially independent of my wages, held down the pay scale for other Tampa women writers. When the *Tribune* bought the *Times* and started looking for a new woman's editor, they could not get one, even from small towns, for what I was making. Hastily I was raised to $125 a week. Money is not everything, and it was not long before I became ill with a case of acute nervous and physical exhaustion, acute meaning it was bad, but temporary.

After recovering, I wrote a trickle of columns, called *World of Ideas*, for Leland Hawes, a discriminating Sunday editor rising from the ranks of a new generation. Then I decided that what I had meant to do with my life was write literature, not newspaper-speak. Being accustomed to the instant rewards of daily journalism, I found the literary schedule dilatory. Two years elapsed between the day my first short story was accepted by the *Georgia Review* and the day it appeared in print. I therefore turned to a latent ambition, antique dealing, in which I am still occupied.

First Chattahoochee, then the *Tribune*, now *The Red Horse*. Funny farms, all of them. Of the three, the early days at the *Tribune* were the most joyous. The "Deacon," Red Newton, Bill Abbott, George White, Paul Wilder, Martin Waldron, Jimmy Council, Bill Dozier, Pete Norton, even the building we worked in, are no more. And as of October 1980, the O'Brien is gone also.

"It's not that I'm older than you are," he would tell his junior. "It's that I have more to remember." He was a critter and a half, and I loved him a lot, especially for seeing me through the *Tribune*, and all that followed.