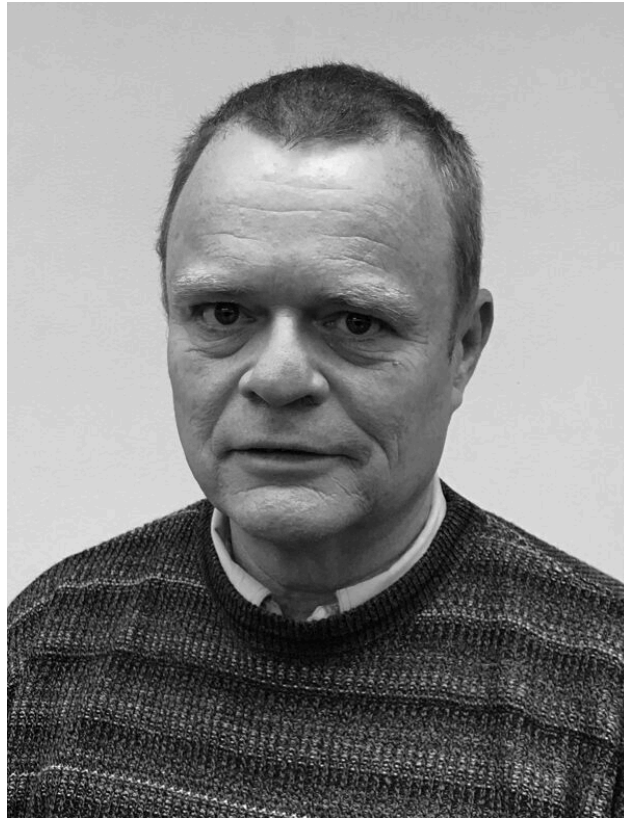


Column: Remembering my friend as I say goodbye

October 14, 2022



Twenty years ago, my publisher at the time suggested I start writing a weekly column. Since that time, I have published “My Turn” in papers in Texas, Arizona, North Dakota and now, Oregon and California.

For the vast majority of the time, I wrote a weekly column, talked about hundreds of topics and even wrote a few where I admitted I had nothing to write about. But week after week, I found a way to write a column. This will be my last as a full-time employee in community journalism.

After I made the decision to change careers, I began to think about what my last column should say. I thought back about the stories I’ve reported on, the people I’ve met and the places this career has taken me.

But in the end, I want to talk about one person, the second editor I worked under. I started my career as a sports reporter, and I honestly can’t remember who my first editor was. But my second, that’s a far different story.

John Moeur was bigger than life, almost literally. He stood 6-8 and weighed more than 600 pounds when I met him. And from the day he walked into the Sierra Vista Herald, he was a bigger than life presence. He dominated a newsroom, using his size and booming voice to take charge.

But his workers were not afraid of him. We would occasionally get scolded, but in John, we all found a friend and an ally. Once I switched to the news side of the business, my desk sat 10 feet from John's office, and he became my best friend and my mentor.

I would spend time every day talking to him, asking questions, soaking in information. He always had time to share and to care.

Because of his size, John was never in the best health, but he always made it to work. Work kind of was his life, I guess. Those who worked for him became his family. If you needed something, John would give it to you. If it was your birthday, you got a cake. Everyone. While many newspapers had monthly celebrations for birthdays, John bought a cake with his money for every birthday one of his employees had.

About four years after John came to Sierra Vista, he left and went to work for a paper in North Carolina to be closer to his son. Shortly thereafter, I moved on as well, taking a job in Texas to be closer to my mom and dad.

But even though John was half a world away, my phone rang every week, and John was on the other line. One day while at my office in Texas, the phone rang and it was John again. This time, he asked me to come to North Carolina to become his news editor. When your best friend calls, you say yes.

So we moved to North Carolina. The work was great, working with John again was great, the culture shock, not so much. My wife, our young son and I made it almost year before we moved on, going back to Texas.

But the weekly calls never stopped. When I decided to look for a job as an editor, I called John. He gave me tips, helped improve my resume and helped me get ready for interviews. I got the job, and I think the proudest person of all was John Moeur.

During my first job as an editor, every Friday the phone would ring and John would be on the other end. We would talk news, family, life. Some weeks he missed, but I could almost count on that phone ringing on Friday.

And then it stopped. No call one week, no call the next. Calls to him went unanswered. Then a co-worker from Sierra Vista posted something on Facebook about John being gone. He got sick, it turned into pneumonia and he died rather quickly.

I was in my mid-30s, had an established career and a growing family, yet all of a sudden I felt all alone. John was my boss, my friend and my mentor, but until he was gone, I had no idea how much I counted on him as a sounding board, as someone who could talk me through anything.

It's been many years now since John died. I think about him often. Today, as I finish my last full day as an editor in community journalism, I'm pretty sure John would be proud of me.

My wish as I move forward is that all of you can find a John Moeur. It hurts when they're gone, but boy is it worth it when you have lessons and memories that never go away.