

~~Isaacs~~  
NORMAN COMES TO THE LOUISVILLE TIMES

~~XXVIII~~ ~~XXVI~~

only?  
OK?  
yes

Toward the end of 1951, Mark had to find a new managing editor for the Louisville Times. Al Aronson, who had <sup>held that job</sup> ~~been the managing editor~~ <sup>for twenty-nine</sup> ~~for 60~~ <sup>years</sup> ~~knows how long~~, was retiring. Mark looked about for some little time, then decided that Norman Isaacs might be the right man. So he called ~~him~~ <sup>Norman</sup> in St. Louis and asked him to come to Louisville to talk <sup>about it</sup> ~~with Barry and him~~. He came and was hired. <sup>At my request</sup> Norman wrote me his own account of the circumstances

see p. 954  
115

Norman not clear here

leading to his hiring and his early experiences in working for Mark:

"...The St. Louis Star Times was torpedoed out of existence June 15, 1951, by its owner Elzey Roberts. I had a great time for some time after that turning down various offers (including that of Bill Hearst, who was constantly beseeching me to go to Chicago). On the eve of Thanksgiving, Dorothy [Norman's wife] and I put Roberta [daughter] on a train to Kansas City to visit a girl friend there for the holiday weekend. We'd just returned home when the phone rang. It was Mark.

see p. 375 re hiring

Mark did the actual hiring, tho out of courtesy he frequenly talked to Barry about it. Some time not.

"It's taken us a hell of a long time to call, hasn't it?" he said.

"Sure has," I replied.

"Well," he said, "Barry and I would like to see you..."

see earlier? re calling w/ly than miss than

at Mrs E's request? see p. 368

21

see above p. 375

x "We set Friday. When I hung up the phone I said, 'We're going to Louisville.'

"Doing what?' Dorothy asked.

x "I replied, 'I don't know. I just know we're moving.' ✓

"Anyway, it was all settled Friday at lunch at the Old House. I go into such detail just to get the classic line involved. I was to come and try to rid the Times of being 'Barry Bingham's five-penny dreadful.' When I asked about the methods of operation, Barry, I think it was, said, 'We operate in a vacuum of freedom.'

"I was chomping on a deep-fried shrimp. When it went down, I <sup>said</sup> asked: 'Wonderful phrase. But what does it mean?'

"Mark twinkled all over... It means,' he said, ✓ that you've got your freedom. If you don't know how to use it, we'll just have to get someone who does.'

"So I came over in mid-December and began to get the feel of things. Al Aronson stuck to his office right up until New Year's Eve and on January 1, officially, I was in charge. ✓

"For weeks after that I tried to change the appearance of the blamed thing, experimenting with all the headline type faces in the composing room.

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Times

What  
is  
the  
question

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Each one struck me as worse than the one that I tried before. Finally I went to Mark.

"None of it works' I told him.

"I see that,' he said.

"Well,' I said, 'I've got to get some stuff in. What do you and Barry prefer?'

"His answer stunned me: 'We're not the managing editor.'

"NI: 'Good grief, Mark, I'm all for having a new face cut. That costs a bundle. You and Barry ought to do the choosing.'

"MFE: 'I told you we're not the managing editor.'

"NI: 'And the cost?'

"MFE: 'Who mentioned money to you?'

"The result of all this, of course, was that I got Jackson Burke of Morgenthaler over to Louisville, the new face 'Spartan' was cut for us, and within two years it was the most widely accepted headline face for afternoon newspapers in the U.S. I think of it as a fascinating sidelight on how Mark managed and administered and gave people their heads. "

~~"What else do you need?"~~

Love,

Norm"

Having <sup>hit</sup> struck such a rock of information

and volubility, I struck again. This time Norman wrote:

*Search for Mark?*

*Inter-  
He never  
read it.*

*note indication that Norman Isaacs letter was in answer to a request from WSE.*

*See?  
p. 366*

"I used to play with the idea of writing a book about MFE myself. "There are hundreds of stories about him....

"He was the toughest publisher/editor I ever saw--in the insistence on quality and accuracy. He was a voracious reader, and particularly so about newspapers. Moreover, his memory was astonishing. Let a story get into the paper misstating some little thing about a situation or person and he would be on the phone instantly, urging editors and reporters to do better checking.

"I discovered early that his knowledge of Louisville and the fat cats in the area was deep, sharp, and buttressed by anecdotes and facts. So in the beginning years I leaned on him.... Got to the point where I also knew where 'all the bodies were buried.' I learned from Mark who was related to whom, what friends they relied on, and how they reacted under pressure. That was what made him such a great negotiator for the city's many problems.

"His ethical sense was sharply honed. There was the New Year's Eve when he settled the threatened transit strike. The workers had to vote during the wee hours and MFE wasn't about to make any public announcement of the deal. But he did try

to get smoke signals to the editors in charge. They were so dense they weren't listening. So the last <sup>edition</sup> ~~edition~~ of the C-J came up with a banner saying the strike was still on. Mark got me out of bed at 2 A.M., saying, 'I'm going to pick you up and we're going downtown and put out an extra. I'll be there in ten minutes.' Hell, I had nothing to do with the C-J at the time. I was ME of the Times.

"But he picked me up and we got into an empty plant. It was clear we didn't have a prayer of getting crews together to put out an extra. We would have had to find printers, stenotypers, and pressmen, and where? Mark fumed about the whole thing for 15/20 minutes, then ~~settled~~ <sup>settled</sup> for getting the night people at WHAS to broadcast the real story. Mad? He was in a towering rage. And the following Monday we had what amounted to a court martial. He said acidly, 'We've got three managing editors around here and none of them works nights.'"

(Mark was counting Jimmie Pope, who by ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> that time was the executive editor of both papers; "Sonny" Day, the managing editor of the Courier; and Norman, the managing editor of the Times.)

"I kept after Sonny Day to change his work schedule," Norman continued. "He said Mark hadn't

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see p. 369

O.K.

really told him to work nights. And I'd say, 'Look, I know good and well he doesn't mean me. I'm here every morning at 7. And I know he doesn't mean Jimmie. Who the hell do you think he means?' Then one day, a couple of months later, he <sup>[Sonny]</sup> said: 'What do you do with all the snotty memos you get from the old man?'

"I stopped in the middle of Armory Place and damned near got killed by two trucks. 'Snotty notes from Mark?' I asked.

"A dozen a day,' he said.

"Jesus God,' I told him, 'you'd better get your ass right back into that place and sit down and talk with him. All I ever get is a note saying what a nice job so-and-so did with something.'

"Oh, hell,' said Sonny, 'if he wants me on the carpet, he'll call me.'

"This was Mark's way of getting the message across. He was not one for calling someone in and raising gain. He had set himself down to read the Courier-Journal as the boss editor, and what he read he didn't like. And so the old Indian smoke signals were coming in hour by hour and Sonny was too stubborn and insensitive to get the code...and it all blew up in his face.

"I go into such detail about this because it illustrates how Mark operated and how many chances he gave people. He talked a great game about our getting turpentine on our tails and moving in on situations. But where he was involved, he found it hard to move in quickly. He gave not the usual two, three, four chances, but ten and twenty. And when his patience was finally exhausted, he would put the turpentine on his own tail and get it done.

✓  
OK as quoted?  
yes  
✓  
✓  
✓

"Mark came out of the journalistic generation that worked hard and drank hard but there's no question but that he was among the toughest of the drinking set," Norman wrote frankly, but not completely; he failed to say, "never <sup>by</sup> the job."

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on that?

"I never knew whether it was literally true, but I always maintained that he had the most remarkable metabolism of any person I ever met. He would get a glaze over him. In most people it would only be a matter of a little while and they'd be out cold. But Mark had the facility of putting down a glass and letting it sit and 30 minutes later there he was clear-eyed and busy and claiming he was dehydrated. Astonishing. I saw it scores of times and never failed to be amazed by it.

"The drinking was part of the tremendous

~~past tense  
ok?~~

gregariousness that marked him....Mark got his charge from companionship and a little glass on the side."

Then Norman related an experience he had suffered when Mark was in a "gregarious" mood (I was out of town, but it could have happened just as well if I had been there):

"Turner Catledge was in town and was supposed to spend the night out in Prospect with Mark. But, as usual, some kind of party got going downtown and Mark, with his usual expansive glow, invited everybody out to the Isaacs to continue the occasion. People drifted off, but Turner and Mark stuck in a corner, talking volubly....Turner ran out of gas about 3 in the morning and went upstairs to bed. Dorothy directing him to Roberta's old room....Mark said he needed another drink and then he'd 'go quietly' (his favorite remark). I said I'd about had it; that I had to get up at 8 and go downtown to make a speech, along with Catledge. So, I said, I'd hit the sack.

"Mark drew himself up in mock indignation. 'Look here,' he said, 'when we brought you here, we accepted you as a man who could hold his liquor like a gentleman. You obviously can't, so

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put it  
back  
up

( ) ok  
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you're through.' And with that he hauled himself upright, made it up the stairs, and took to bed in Steve's room. ~~[Steve is Norm's brilliant son]~~

now editor  
of the  
Minneapolis  
Tribune.)

"I shook Catledge in the morning and Dorothy fed us coffee and stuff and I related the evening's culmination. We laughed and went on our way. After our public appearances ~~w~~<sup>r</sup> got the word Mark was throwing a luncheon at the ~~renderis~~.

"After a couple of drinks, Turner got warmed up and said, 'Mark, what's this about you telling my great, good friend, Norm, that he's through?'

"Mark was quick to accept the lead and said, 'Yessir, I had to do it....'

"Catledge then said, 'Now look, he's an old, dear friend of mine. Do you have somebody to take his place right away?'

"Mark allowed as how he didn't and Catledge said, 'Well, what's the harm in keeping him on until you find what you want?'

"Mark beamed, pointed to me, and said, 'Okay, you're the acting Managing Editor.'

"We all laughed, little knowing it was to become the office by-word and catch-all. When I got promoted to Executive Editor" ~~had ret/red~~ <sup>when</sup> Jimmie Pope

"Mark had to say wryly, sotto voce,

Ed.  
Cape  
in  
V-P?

'acting Executive Editor.' And when I got a vice-president added, it also became acting V-P."

caps?

In signing off, Norman declared the story was "indicative of the tie-line that held all of us together under Mark...affectionate episodes that added brightness and color."

Mark ~~has~~ always boasted <sup>about</sup> ~~that~~ hiring Norman ~~was a smart move on Barry's and his part.~~ "He was the best" he started to say on one occasion; then after a second's hesitation, added, "no, I'll have to say the second best, for I've already said Jimmie Pope was the best managing editor a paper ever had."

see  
p. 366

see  
p. 109