

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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How quickly nothing changes

Going to a college far away has pros and cons: you get the chance to start over, but you know nobody; you have a whole new location to explore but you have no idea where anything is; there is no way your parents can visit without considerable notice, but... well, maybe there's no con to that one.

The biggest challenge is suddenly having two different worlds that rarely, if ever, interact with each other. No one understands the lure of cliff jumping into the amazingly clear waters of a mine pit, why Rangers pronounce 'sauna' correctly or the irresistible temptation of sitting on a frozen lake for days at a time.

My favorite example of worlds colliding occurred in mid-April, when an author by the name of Bill Bryson came to speak in Des Moines, where I go to school.

For those of you who don't know the guy, Bill Bryson is originally from Des Moines and now lives in England. He's sold



Matt Nelson
HDT Intern

thousands, if not millions of books.

When my dad and I went ice fishing last December, we brought one of his along, a non-fiction book entitled "A Walk in the Woods," in which Bryson and a companion attempted to walk the entirety of the Appalachian trail. While reading the opening chapters, I formed a bright image of myself happily gallumping along the trail, pack on my back.

Further into the book, when Bryson was forced to spend many freezing nights in dilapidated shelters, dealt with agonizing back pain and, well, made it seem a lot less endearing to me.

Being a journalism student, I had the chance to speak face-to-face with Bryson. I told him how much my dad and I had enjoyed his book, passing it back and forth around an ice hole.

He looked at me, confused, and asked me to tell him about ice fishing. I explained how my dad and I would go out onto the ice in a fish house, usually for about two or three days.

At this point, the man who walked for days at a time in miserable weather, lived off of the barest of rations said to me:

"But - why would anybody 'want to do' that?"

My point is that some things don't always make the transition to and from the Iron Range. It kind of made me worry that my relationships formed prior to coming home

might not be the same.

Last weekend, I got the chance to test that hypothesis. I left my home of Hibbing and embarked for the Twin Cities, to visit some friends from college. It marked the first time I had been off the Iron Range this summer, and the first time I had seen anybody from Des Moines since May.

And, somehow, nothing was different. We all met up in the basement of a house in Minneapolis, went out for dinner (at a White Castle; we are college students, after all), and sat around a bonfire (in a residential neighborhood. That was weird.). We talked as if we had seen each other just the day before.

I think the mark of really strong friendship lies in the ability of people to ignore time and move past the restrictions of geographical location. The people you really understand and who really understand you are the ones that matter.

This may be the first time I'm really excited to go back to school.

ku'dos, noun 1. fame; honor; glory; prestige; credit; as for an achievement.

2. a Hibbing Daily Tribune column featuring words straight from the community recognizing outstanding individuals and institutions.

Kudos to the Hibbing Historical Society for its generous donation of \$500 for the cleaning and waxing of the Frank Hibbing statue. It has made a terrific difference in the appearance and preservation of the statue. Thank you, Historical Society.

Kudos to Historical Society President Pru Lotech who donat-



ed flowers and did the planting of those flowers at the Frank Hibbing Park sign. It has been many years since flowers were planted in that area and it adds so much to the park to have those bright blooms. Everyone should stop by to enjoy this little gem in Hibbing's park system. Thank you, Pru.

Kudos ... I would like to thank everyone who worked on the 1959 Class Reunion. It was by far the best. I know it took a lot of work and everyone who attended enjoyed it all. Thanks again. (Submitted by Kathy (Clark) Olson)

Kudos to Coach Greg Helstrom, his assistants, and all the

volunteers who made the 2009 Run 'N Shoot Girls' Basketball Camp possible. Their commitment is greatly appreciated. A huge thank you to Marcia Grahek for the countless hours she spends helping to make this event a huge success. Kudos to the Girls' Hoop Club for continuing to sponsor this wonderful event. The girls had a great time and learned a lot!

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Cronkite's offensive history

It's time for a post-Cronkite post-mortem, but not on the late "icon" himself -- the "most trusted man in America," the "voice of God," "the gold standard," the "proxy for a nation," or, in plainer English, the lush-lived celebrity "anchor" who died this month at age 92. No, the Cronkite post-mortem that's needed is for the zombies who conjured up the hollow rapture and the living dead who fell for it.

Harsh words? You bet. But I don't know how else to begin to assess a nation that sees fit to celebrate, crown, even worship a man who said his "proudest moment" was when he declared on CBS, having misinterpreted the 1968 Tet offensive as a victory for North Vietnam, that the Vietnam war was unwinnable for the United States. "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America," almost every Cronkite obituary approvingly quoted President Lyndon B. Johnson as having said in response -- never mind that Cronkite was flat-out wrong in his reporting.

This was the infamous "stalemate" broadcast in which Cronkite editorialized in unprecedented manner: "It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who ... did the best they could." Cronkite his obit-omnipotence, despite alone wasn't responsible for LBJ's offer again to negotiate



Diana West
Columnist

with Hanoi, his decision not to run for re-election, the ultimate flagging of America's commitment to South Vietnam, or one million-plus boat people who fled the communist regime, but the famed broadcaster was without doubt a key influence in persuading the nation, particularly its elites, to accept, if not court, American defeat in Vietnam.

So, to use his own words, was Walter Cronkite an honorable journalist who did the best he could?

No. What may -- may -- have resulted from forgivable misimpressions due to the "fog of war" long ago crystallized into obdurate lies. Cronkite never clarified the record, never admitted that the Tet offensive -- the Vietcong's surprise holiday attack on cities across South Vietnam -- resulted in a military and political fiasco for North Vietnam.

This was becoming apparent even before the dust had settled in 1968, as we learn in Peter Braestrup's indispensable "The Big Story", one of the signal historical works of the 20th century, which meticulously analyzes the media's failure to assess Tet correctly as a defeat for North Vietnam. Even Leftist journalist Frances Fitzgerald in her Pulitzer Prize-winning "Fire in the Lake" reported that Tet had "seriously depleted" Vietcong forces and "wiped out" many of their "most experienced cadres," noting that such losses drove "the southern movement for the first time into almost total dependency on the north." Her conclusion: "By all the indices available to the American military, the Tet offensive was a major defeat for the enemy."

And the enemy agreed. In a 1995 interview with the Wall Street Journal, Bui Tin, a member of the North Vietnamese general staff who in 1975 personally received the unconditional surrender of South Vietnam, called North Vietnam's losses in Tet "staggering." Communist forces in the South, he explained, "were nearly wiped out by all the fighting in 1968. It took us until 1971 to re-establish our presence, but we had to use North Vietnamese troops as local guerillas. If the American forces had not begun to withdraw under Nixon in 1969," he added, "they could have punished us severely." And who

knows? If Cronkite had not used Tet to nudge for negotiations, maybe American forces would not have begun to withdraw.

Bui Tin said North Vietnamese commander Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap told him Tet was "a military defeat though we had gained the planned political advantages when Johnson agreed to negotiate and did not run for re-election."

Well, who could blame him? The president had "lost Cronkite."

And so be it. The president lost Cronkite, the United States lost Vietnam. But why are the rest of us still stuck with Cronkite's Orwellian packaging as "America's most trusted newsman" 41 years after he totally and calamitously and obstinately blew Tet? The ongoing genuflection before "Uncle Walter" reveals something mighty weird about this body politic -- something beyond the ken of a mere journalist, something more in the line of work of a really good shrink.

Diana West is the author of "The Death of the Grown-up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization," and blogs at dianawest.net. She can be contacted via dianawest@verizon.net.



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