

THESE OBJECTS HAVE STORIES OF THEIR OWN

Colleagues Discuss Items That Have Shaped Times Coverage

Photographs by HENRY LEUTWYLER for The New York Times



The Unpublished Front Page

By DEAN BAQUET

It is widely accepted that the print front page does not have the power it once did — except for historic events like the election of a new president. It is a keepsake, a memento. So there is enormous pressure to come up with the perfect headline, one that will stand up to time.

“Madam President” was just that. It didn’t have the candidate’s name. It did not have to. Those two words caught the fact that America had chosen its first female leader. It was the formal title that would be used in official settings. And the accompanying stories were designed to dwell on the moment, on the changing role of women in society, politics and power. There was even a full discussion over what to call her husband, a former president.

Except none of it was ever published, because to the surprise of most of us in the newsroom, and even to the ultimate winner, Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 election to Donald J. Trump.

That night in the newsroom — the tossing of stories and the frantic creation of new ones — was a first sign of the confusion and the chaos that would come to characterize American elections for the next decade. Chaos is the right word. The place was filled with guests, friends and spouses who assumed they would witness the election of the first woman as president.

I remember feeling conflicted, the editor’s curiosity mixed with the shock that newsrooms nationwide had missed something large. But the overall impulse was to fix the thing, to tear up the paper and start all over again — which is what we set about doing.

We almost always prepare two front pages — in fact two full packages of stories — for presidential elections. It would be hard if not impossible to ready the mix of analysis and biography right up against the deadline. American elections are usu-

ally pretty close. Mostly there are no surprises, and the perfunctory stories about the losing candidate are set aside. There was in fact a special section ready to go after George W. Bush defeated Al Gore, but the presses were stopped, and the papers were scrapped when Gore withdrew his concession.

But in the case of Clinton versus Trump, very little effort was put into the possibility that Trump would win. Most of us believed that it was highly unlikely; almost all polls and conventional political wisdom had Trump losing to Clinton.

No “Trump Wins” headline was prepared in advance. It was a lesson, one that would influence reporting in America for the next 10 years. Polls are fine, but nothing beats getting out and talking to people. There had been an enormous shift in the country, and most of the press and political pundits had missed it.

But that night started in typical fashion. Newsrooms are largely quiet as the votes come on election night. The stories are mostly written. Fast food is served to the editors and the writers waiting for results. Typical fare is pizza.

Trip Gabriel, a reporter assigned to cover voters, recalled being less certain of a Clinton victory. He had seen signs in his travels, but he, too, expected Trump to lose. Trip’s election night assignment was to talk to the mourning Trump voters, at a working-class bar in Ambridge, Pa., a struggling steel town.

The bar patrons in Ambridge were not paying much attention to the television coverage droning on. There was a ferocious dart game underway. And they certainly were not mourning, since they were convinced Trump would win.

“Everywhere you went there were nothing but Trump signs,” Trip recalled of that part of the state. Back in the New York newsroom, we had to scramble. Reporters and senior leaders huddled around the Politics desk, staring into their phones or at computers as surprising vote tallies started to come in from Florida and elsewhere. Suddenly a race that was to end early was getting close. I called reporters to ask what they were hearing, including one who was in touch with the people around Senator Mitch McConnell. The Republicans remained certain that Trump would lose.

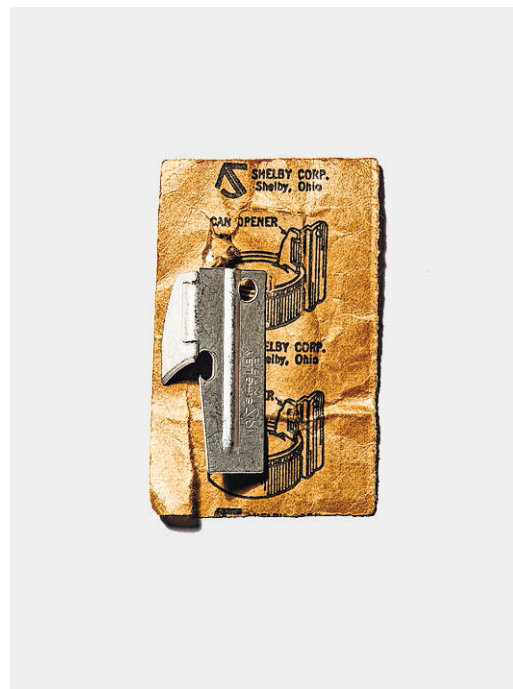
But then the numbers came in. In Pennsylvania, Trip got a frantic call from an editor. “Oh my God,” the editor said. “He is going to win.”

Trip sat in his rental car in the parking lot of the bar and, in about 45 minutes, tapped out a story that would eventually make the front page under the headline “A Blue-Collar Town in Decline and in Despair Turns to Trump.”

The “Madam President” headline was scrapped for “Trump Triumphs.”

From top, Dean Baquet with the scrapped headline, and at The Times on Nov. 8, 2016.

HIROKO MASUIKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES



The Things I Carried

By JAMES P. STERBA

After nearly two years of war reporting, I was two days away from leaving Vietnam and cleaning out my room in the Continental Palace Hotel, half a block from The Times’s local office. I packed one bag for my next assignment, in Jakarta, Indonesia, but shipped a few other items home, including keepsakes from the war.

A light nylon and polyester poncho liner, tossed to me by a commander at an artillery base one chilly night in the highlands, is still in use; I take it with me to the couch when my snoring wakes my spouse. Several P-38 can openers, essential for eating field rations, are scattered in various drawers. A box of C rations now sits on my home office bookshelf. And I have a helmet, or “steel pot” as it was known, resting on a basement shelf. It came from a combat base near the Demilitarized Zone where incoming North Vietnamese rockets regularly killed and wounded Marines. Someone suggested I grab one from a pile of gear



The Things I Carried

By JAMES P. STERBA

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THE NEW YORK TIMES AT 175
This story is part of a series marking 175 years of eyewitness journalism from The New York Times. Read more at nytimes.com/175.

stripped from the dead. Written inside a fold in the canvas camouflage cover of the helmet I picked are two words I took as a dead grunt’s message to me: The first was an expletive. The second was “you.”

James P. Sterba was a reporter for The Times from 1967 to 1982.

An Unexpected Email

By JODI KANTOR and MEGAN TWOHEY

On the morning of Oct. 5, 2017, hours before we published our investigation revealing that the film producer Harvey Weinstein had harassed and abused women for decades, we received an unexpected email.

We were waiting for Weinstein’s response to our findings, and to see if he would follow through on threats to sue the paper. And while our article drew on a legal and financial trail of secret settlements and damning human resources records, only two women had been willing to share their accounts on the record.

One of them was Laura Madden, who had a terrible account of being abused by Weinstein when she worked as his assistant a quarter-century earlier. For months, she and Jodi had been speaking — over text, on the phone, on a Cornwall beach — and she had given us permission to use her name and experience.

But making allegations against powerful men could backfire, with accusers suffering public attack. Weinstein was known to be vengeful. Madden, and every other woman involved, faced the question: Why take the leap?

She was also contending with another factor. Madden had recently been treated for breast cancer, and her second mastectomy and reconstructive surgery were going to collide with the publication of our article.

As our deadline approached, we worried that she would drop out. At 6:56 a.m., we received an email from Madden:

I feel obliged to talk about the events that happened to me at Miramax as I realize that I’m in the fortunate position of not being employed in the film business and so my livelihood won’t be affected. I’m also not one of those that have been silenced even though individuals under Harvey Weinstein have tried to persuade me to be silent. I do not have a gagging order against me either. I feel I am speaking out on behalf of women who can’t because their livelihoods or marriages may be affected. I am the mother of 3 daughters and I do not want them to have to accept this kind of bullying behavior in any setting as ‘normal.’ I have been through life changing health issues and know that time is precious and confronting bullies is important. My family are all supportive of my decision.

I am happy to go on record.

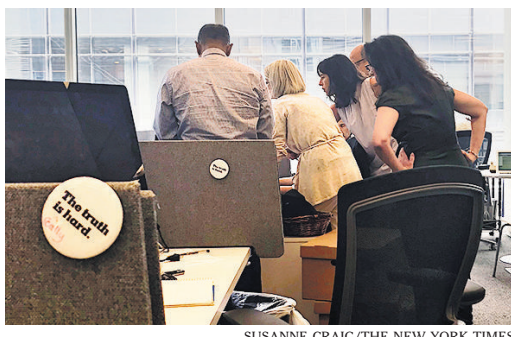
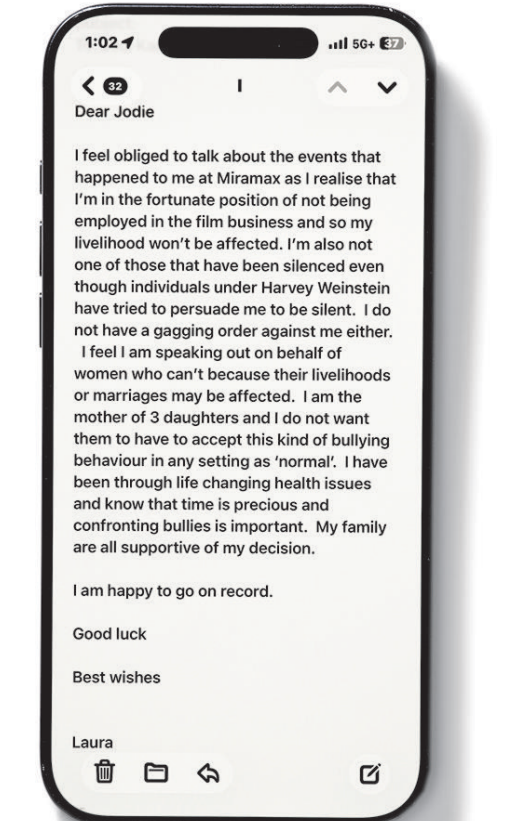
Good luck
Best wishes
Laura

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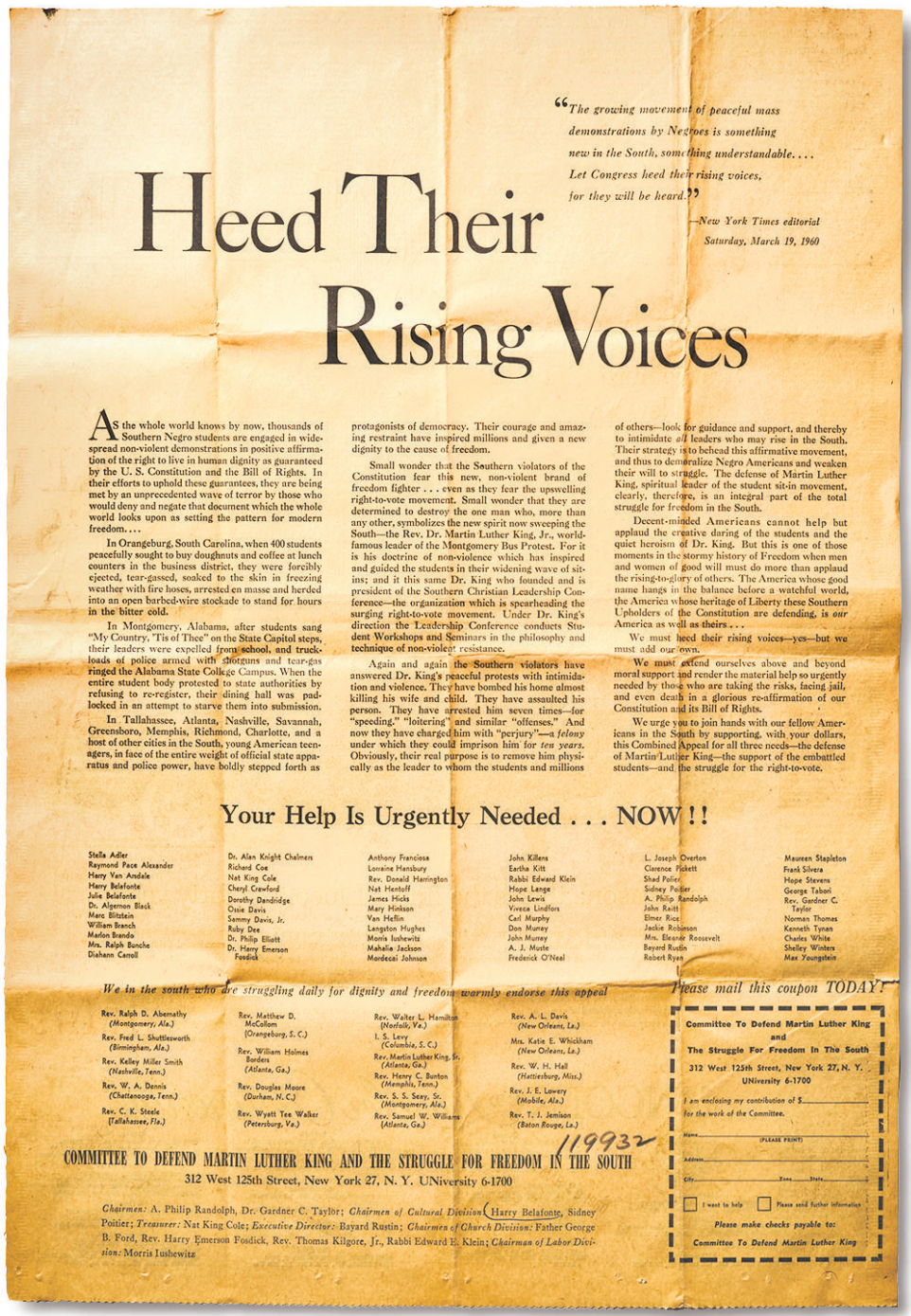
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Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey are investigative reporters at The Times. Their investigation of Harvey Weinstein shared in the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for public service.



Jodi Kantor, Megan Twohey and colleagues as they prepared to publish the Weinstein investigation online in October 2017.



The Ad That Changed Journalism

By DAVID MCCRAW

On a Tuesday morning in March 1960, a legal revolution began in a most unlikely place: a full-page ad in The New York Times.

Supporters of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. purchased the ad, headlined “Heed Their Rising Voices,” a phrase picked up from a Times editorial that ran a few days earlier. It called on readers to stand up for civil rights protesters under attack in cities across the South. The ad claimed that, with tear gas and shotguns, the police in Montgomery, Ala., had confronted Black students who were peacefully demonstrating and singing patriotic songs and then padlocked their college dining hall “to starve them into submission.”

But the ad contained minor factual errors, and L.B. Sullivan, a white city commissioner in Montgomery and an ardent supporter of segregation, took notice. He was in charge of the local police, and he sued The Times for libel, even though his name appeared nowhere in the ad. A jury awarded him \$500,000.

By the time the case reached the Supreme Court in 1964, such suits had become commonplace for Southern officials who hoped that the tactic could drive away the Northern news organizations chronicling civil rights abuses. The Times alone was facing 11 libel suits by local and state officials seeking a total of \$5.6 million.

The Supreme Court was unambiguous in its response. In a unanimous decision, it held that under the First Amendment public officials could no longer prevail in libel suits unless they could prove that the publishers had acted with “actual malice.” Sullivan, who could not show any of the errors were intentional, went home empty-handed.

The ad has always struck me as an unlikely vehicle for advancing the cause of press freedom. It wasn’t journalism; it involved no reporting. The decision to publish was made by advertising executives, not editors. And rejecting Sullivan’s libel claim hardly required a deep reappraisal of constitutional law. Did any of Sullivan’s like-minded friends and neighbors really think less of him as a result of a civil rights advocacy ad that never mentioned his name? And ran in a paper that in Montgomery had a circulation of 35?



David McCraw is a senior vice president and deputy general counsel for The Times.



A Flak Jacket That Fit

By SOMINI SENGUPTA

In August 2003, I was covering the last days of the war to oust Charles Taylor, Liberia’s warlord turned president. A photographer took a picture of me during a firefight, crossing a bridge in Monrovia that divided the rebel-held and government-held sides of the city. The flak jacket I was wearing was clearly too big. I was swimming in it. A bullet or a piece of shrapnel could easily have slipped in. The standard-issue flak jackets available at

the time were made for bigger people — men, presumably. So I asked the International desk to have one made in my size. I chose a color that suits me, forest green, with a matching helmet. It protected me for 15 years and in 10 conflict zones.

Somini Sengupta was the West Africa bureau chief for The Times from 2003 to 2005. She is now a correspondent for the International desk.

Dressing for a Plague

By SHERI FINK

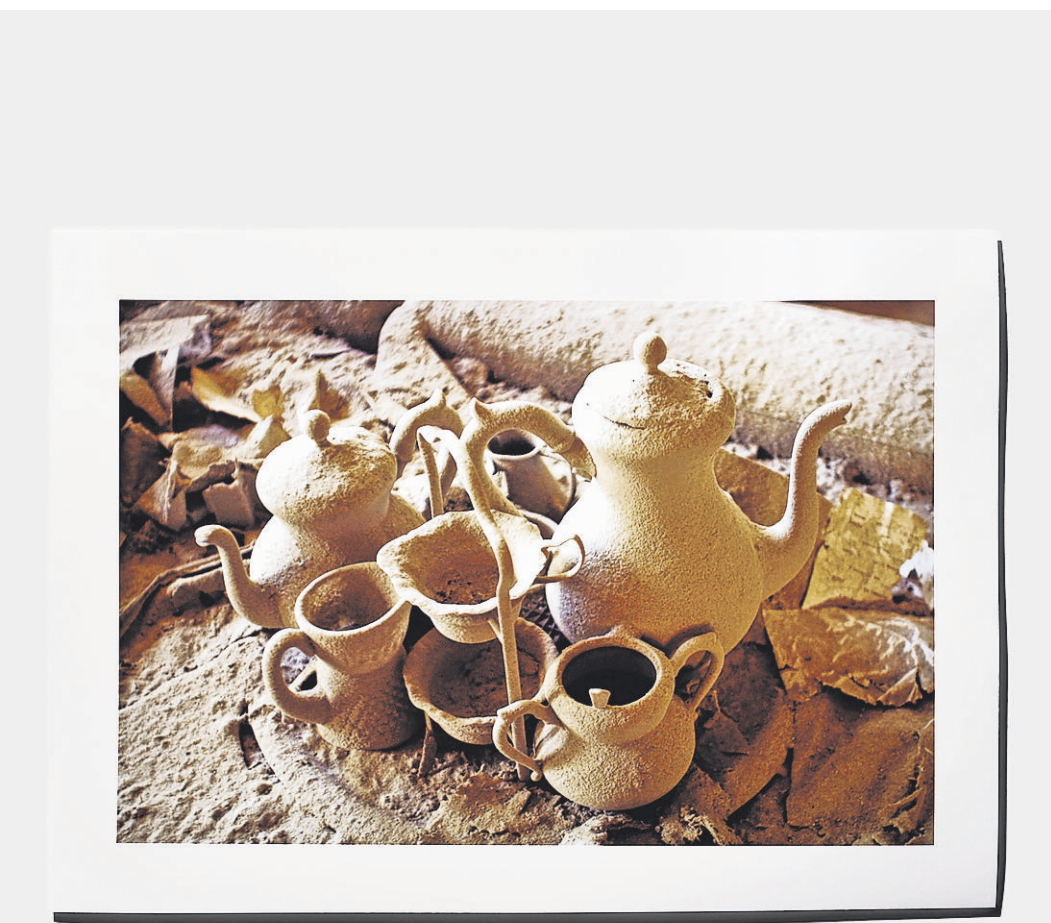
In 2014, I went to West Africa to write about the widespread Ebola outbreak in three affected countries.

I had bought protective gear on Amazon for reporting at a treatment unit and learned how to use it at the Center for Domestic Preparedness in Anniston, Ala., from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention staff members. We practiced in the September heat, memorizing complicated instructions for removing the gear while avoiding self-contamination.

The suits had been designed primarily for other settings, including chemical manufacturing plants and pharmaceutical factories. After we arrived in Liberia, we discovered just how challenging the suits were to use in outdoor units: They stopped the virus, which spreads by contact, but they were unbearable to wear for long periods in the high heat and humidity. Medical staff members needed to ration their time with patients to avoid becoming dehydrated and passing out on floors contaminated with infectious body fluids.

After coming out of the hot zone, one doctor would sit and pour out what seemed like a liter of sweat from his rubber boots. The sense was that better equipment needed to be produced specifically for infectious-disease workers. It was sad six years later, when Covid emerged, to see that little progress had been made.

Sheri Fink is a reporter on the investigations team at The Times whose work often focuses on medical care during crises.



More Than a Tea Set

By DAVID ROHDE

Like dozens of reporters on Sept. 11, 2001, I headed to the World Trade Center after news reports that a plane had crashed into one of the towers. When I got off the subway, I saw both towers ablaze. Like thousands of others, I ran for my life as each collapsed.

Soon after, though, I headed toward 125 Cedar Street, fearing that my college friend’s mother might be trapped inside. It was the apartment where, years before, I’d spent my first night in New York. It also looked out on the World Trade Center.

I found a firefighter and asked him to help me search the apartment. After he broke down the door with an ax, we found no one inside. The towers’ collapses had blown the windows inward — not simply shattering the glass but blasting the metal frames into the apartment and hurling them to the floor.

Bits of concrete and glass blanketed the apartment, which was caked in dust. On the floor, I found a tattered sheet of paper from Cantor Fitzgerald, an investment firm in the north tower that lost 658 people that day. How the paper landed in the apartment baffled me; the home faced the south tower, not the north one.

A few days later, I visited the apartment again with Eddie Keating, a Times photographer. When we walked inside, I thought the windows, or perhaps the paper from Cantor Fitzgerald on the floor, might catch Eddie’s eye.

Instead, Eddie, saying little, crisscrossed the unit. The click of his camera intermittently broke the silence. We left, I think, after about 10 minutes, eager to capture what we could at ground zero before the police kicked us out.

Days later, a picture Eddie took in the apartment ran on the front of a section called “A Nation Challenged.” It was a close-up of a pewter tea set caked in dust, a 30-year-old wedding gift. It was an ordinary object that I had completely missed. Eddie said he walked past the tea set several times without taking a picture of it. He did so just before leaving the apartment because he felt the tea set screamed out to him to be photographed. Eddie, of course, saw something: the line between before and after.

For months, Eddie devoted himself to chronicling the search for survivors and the cleanup at ground zero — breathing noxious air, evading po-



lice, even disguising himself as a worker. He used photography to capture what was lost and the heroism of the searchers. His work helped The Times win the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for breaking news photography. But the tea set will forever be his defining image of those days.

The tea set, now cleaned, sits in the 9/11 Memorial Museum. After my friend’s mother, Elaine Williamson, passed away in 2013, her family donated it to the museum. Eddie died of cancer in 2021 at the age of 65. He attributed the disease to the months he spent at ground zero. Before his death, he called me with a simple request: Would I sign an affidavit attesting to the fact that he had worked at ground zero? I did.

David Rohde was a reporter at The Times from 1996 to 2011. He is now a senior national security reporter for MS NOW.

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THESE OBJECTS
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From Preceding Page



A Distraction During Wartime

By SARAH LYALL

Before there was Wordle, before there was Connections, before there was Spelling Bee or Strands or Sudoku, there was the O.C. of New York Times puzzles: the Crossword. And before the Crossword, the paper had no puzzles at all.

The publication of the first crossword, on Feb. 15, 1942, above, was a concession to popular taste and a bold leap into new territory for the staid Times. While most major American newspapers had carried crosswords for years, the paper refused to publish them and regularly inveighed against them in print. They are “a primitive sort of mental exercise,” The Times wrote, irritably, in 1924, and “a sinful waste of time.”

But then came the bombing of Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, and the mood in the country turned dark. Didn’t the readers deserve a diversionary activity?

“We ought to proceed with the puzzle,” The Times’s Sunday editor, Lester Markel, wrote on Dec. 18 in a memo to the publisher, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, “especially in view of the fact it is possible there will now be bleak blackout hours — or if not that then certainly a need for relaxation of some kind or other.”

Markel’s memo was attached to a note to the publisher from the pioneering crossword editor Margaret Petherbridge Farrar, who made her own case for why the paper should have the puzzle. “I don’t think I have to sell you on the increased demand for this type of pastime in an increasingly worried world,” she wrote.

She added, “You can’t think of your troubles while solving a crossword.”

The modern crossword had been brought into being by Arthur Wynne of The New York World,



PHOTOGRAPH BY HENRY LEUTWYLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

when he devised what he called a “Word-Cross,” which made its debut on Dec. 21, 1913.

In 1921, the editor in chief’s secretary, Margaret Petherbridge — she would become Margaret Farrar when she married John C. Farrar, a founder of Farrar, Straus and Giroux — was assigned to help Wynne.

Though at first she dismissed crosswords as “a sort of necessary nuisance in the obscure corner of the paper,” she soon caught the bug herself. Meanwhile, Americans were going wild for the new pastime. A book of crosswords edited by Petherbridge and others published in 1924 by the fledgling Simon & Schuster publishing company sold 350,000 copies the first year alone. Libraries were inundated by cruciverbalists, as crossword puzzle solvers are called.

When The Times finally changed course, there was really only one person to hire to run this new feature: Farrar. In her 26 years as the paper’s founding crossword puzzle editor, she helped begin the era of the modern crossword, establishing industrywide standards and practices. Among her rules: All the letters in the puzzle have to intersect with at least one other letter, no words can be repeated in the grid and the grid has to have rotational symmetry. (These are broken on special occasions.)

The first puzzle, written by Charles Erlenkotter, was titled “Headlines and Footnotes.” There were questions about trivia, vocabulary and current events; quotations from Shakespeare; references to Greek and Roman mythology; and lots of references to the war.

Farrar, christened the “grand dame of the American crossword puzzle” by The Washington Post, occasionally contributed puzzles she’d written herself, under the pseudonym Anna Gram. She continued editing puzzles after her retirement from The Times. When she died, in 1984, she was working on her 134th book of crossword puzzles.

Sarah Lyall is a writer at large for The Times.

and there. As for the “polished” wood, it was only bark. We

sanded the outside of wooden boxes to remove saw marks so that the packages would have a smooth, factory-made appearance, less likely to arouse suspicion. Some inside parts were sanded to remove possible fingerprints. Since wood is porous, sweat from the fingers partially penetrates the surface. A short distance, or in essence that mostly wiping wood does not reliably remove fingerprints. Some metal parts also were scrubbed with sandpaper or sand paper for a

[The following is an accurate transcript of the letter sent to the New York Times in June, 1995.]

New York Times:

This is a message from FC, [redacted] +374.

If the enclosed manuscript is published reasonably soon and receives wide public exposure, we will permanently desert from terrorism in accord with the agreement that we proposed in our last letter to you.

In that letter we stated that whoever agreed to publish the

manuscript was to have exclusive rights to it for six months, after

which the material was to become public property. We are willing to do

flexible about the six-month limit. The reason we offered exclusive

rights (temporarily) was to provide an incentive for publication of

the manuscript. Obviously, whoever published it would hope to profit

by doing so. We assume that the six-month limit should be ample

for the material as published in a periodical, but if it is published in

book form, we know how low the publisher would make exclusive

rights. [redacted] have a reasonable expectation of making a profit.

So, if the NY Times arranges for publication in book form, we leave

the period of exclusive rights to your discretion. But it should be

no longer than necessary and in any case must not exceed one year,

unless you publish in the Times good and convincing reasons for making

it longer than that. We don’t want our material to remain locked up for

a copyright, especially if it is published in the form of a book and the book

doesn’t sell.

ROSEN MORTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Safety in Colors

By HIROKO TABUCHI

When a tsunami in 2011 crippled the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan, setting off fuel meltdowns, reporters in the field were initially in the dark. How much radiation was out there? Were we safe? Somehow, our Tokyo bureau manager procured a Russian-made Soeks Geiger counter from an obscure corner of Japan’s online marketplace. Smaller than a cellphone, it flashed radiation levels in microsieverts, the preferred international measure, along with simple color codes: green for safe, yellow for caution, red for danger.

I took it everywhere, including deep into the radioactive exclusion zone, where clocks remained stopped at 2:46 p.m. and abandoned cows peered through hedges.

At one point, behind a deserted home, the device flashed red, hitting levels are around 0.1 microsieverts an hour. Yet it was hard to stay terrified of an invisible threat. Not long after the flashes subsided, an evacuee I was with peeled his hazmat suit to his waist to smoke a cigarette.

I still wonder if the elevated levels of radiation I encountered increased my risks of getting cancer. When the Soeks spiked, I did try to get the hell out of there. If I live a long, healthy life, I’ll owe it, at least in part, to this little device.

Hiroko Tabuchi was the Tokyo business correspondent for The Times from 2009 to 2014. She now covers pollution and the environment.

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Though at first she dismissed crosswords as “a sort of necessary nuisance in the obscure corner of the paper,” she soon caught the bug herself. Meanwhile, Americans were going wild for the new pastime. A book of crosswords edited by Petherbridge and others published in 1924 by the fledgling Simon & Schuster publishing company sold 350,000 copies the first year alone. Libraries were inundated by cruciverbalists, as crossword puzzle solvers are called.

When The Times finally changed course, there was really only one person to hire to run this new feature: Farrar. In her 26 years as the paper’s founding crossword puzzle editor, she helped begin the era of the modern crossword, establishing industrywide standards and practices. Among her rules: All the letters in the puzzle have to intersect with at least one other letter, no words can be repeated in the grid and the grid has to have rotational symmetry. (These are broken on special occasions.)

The first puzzle, written by Charles Erlenkotter, was titled “Headlines and Footnotes.” There were questions about trivia, vocabulary and current events; quotations from Shakespeare; references to Greek and Roman mythology; and lots of references to the war.

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Remains of a Crossfire

By SUZANNE DALEY

In 1998, sheep farming was a major industry in Lesotho, a tiny, impoverished mountain kingdom surrounded by South Africa. It was not a place you expected to encounter danger. In fact, three years into a four-year stint as the South Africa bureau chief, I had yet to find a reason to go there. So, when citizens began protesting an election, I thought: Here is my chance.

But the day I set off from Johannesburg with João Silva, our photographer, and Greg Marinovich, a freelancer, South Africa staged a surprise invasion, aiming to end the unrest. The move set Lesotho’s military, numbering about 2,000 soldiers, against one of the continent’s most sophisticated armies. Tanks rolled in. Helicopters circled.

The South Africans didn’t expect much of a fight. But they got one. And we drove right into it. Lesotho’s capital, Maseru, was on fire and looters were everywhere. Some 30 people died that day.

Our effort to reach Lesotho’s Army base outside town became a disaster. When we arrived, snipers shot at us. We crawled from the car into a ditch and waited. After a while, a South African patrol appeared, and we retreated with them, parking at some distance from the base to decide what to do next.

It was a poor choice. The engine was barely off before bullets ripped up the right side of the car, wounding Greg in the leg, flattening the tires and knocking out the brakes on that side. Still, we managed to face away, the car listing badly.

I am not much for keepsakes. But I kept a piece of that car — a reminder of how, without warning, life can go very wrong.

Suzanne Daley was the South Africa bureau chief for The Times from 1995 to 1999. She now oversees the international print edition.



Top, Suzanne Daley with a piece of a car she was in when it came under fire during a reporting trip in Lesotho in 1998. After the shooting, she took shelter in a tank, above.

João Silva/The New York Times

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