

Editorial

THE *REAL* POWER OF THE PRESS

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I was once married to a newspaper editor. Very bright. Lots of original ideas. Nobody's fool. And yet, without knowing it, this man followed the rules. The unstated rules, the ones we don't realize are there. The hidden framework within which all our ideas are contained.

I would argue with him. Furious. Frustrated. This good, concerned, magnanimous man did not even know what I was talking about when I told him that what he considered "news" was not. That it should be called "the olds."

"Please!" I would plead. "Don't you realize? you are seeing the world through a certain set of glasses. Your view refracts the world so that what sticks out is violence, murder, greed, war. What we see is what we get. To focus on evil is to amplify it."

Imagine a new way of seeing. Imagine that we are wearing a new set of glasses. A set of glasses which, rather than refracting the world into black and white, pimping for "hard news" (as in "hard ass," as in "hard on"), we seek the heart of things, the soft underbelly of each of us, our vulnerabilities, our dreams and longings, the ways we do manage to connect, to cooperate, to build. A set of glasses which, instead of scoffing at this "soft news" (as in "softheaded," as in "softie"), values this *real* news, the miracles of every day, enormously, knowing that whatever we value, we shall attract.

Every day each of us experiences certain moments when creation opens — into tiny sprouts of affection, of goodness, of generosity . . . In my car today, for example, doing errands, an old man smiled at me from the sidewalk as I was sitting at a stoplight. Smiled, with no reason. A few blocks later, the woman driving the car behind me in the right lane generously drew back so that I could cut in front of her. I smiled and waved.

Every day in all the communities in the world, there are these moments of opening among us, tiny sprouts of affection which grow when they are acknowledged, and nourished, and shined upon. The spotlight of media is like the sun, it illumines, it warms, it heats up. It could fan the flames of creation, rather than the flames of war.

Not much has changed since the '70s, and those intense discussions with my then-husband. The olds that they call “the news” continue to blast us with cynical coverage of negative events. Unless we are very unusual, we are not immune to the fear, despair, and hatred this kind of coverage provokes.

My then-husband did not see the primary responsibility played by the media in maintaining the world-view of futility and gloom. To him, competition and territorial disputes were the stuff of life, when in fact they are only one culture's narrowly prescribed way of moving through life. The continuing intensive media focus on the dark side of human nature, without balancing it with an equal interest in the beauty and the love of which all of us are capable and which most of us experience on a daily basis, is heartbreaking. This news, this *real* news. Just think of what could happen if it were amplified!

Were newsmen and newswomen to turn around, look inside, recognize the assumptions they hold about the world as purely that, mere assumptions, with no proof, no justification — perhaps then they could step back from those assumptions long enough to begin to change them.

We must know the cage we are in before we can escape it.

Were media to take full responsibility for what it shows, recognizing that every story is a choice among an infinite number of alternatives; were media to recognize that what

happens in the world is in large part conditioned by what we expect to happen, and that whatever we focus on *will* come true; were the media to transform into a lens to refract all the colors of the rainbow blooming in divine creation; were the media to rejoice in and enhance the creative power within each and every one of us to build a transformed world, then this change could happen literally overnight. Political power is nothing compared to the power of the press.