



The HEALTH PHYSICS SOCIETY'S Newsletter

Volume XXVII Number 8

For Specialists in Radiation Safety

August 1999

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Goodwyn's Editorial Cartoons Speak Truths

Mary Walchuk

In *The Ring and the Book* Robert Browning wrote, "It is the glory and good of Art, That Art remains the one way possible Of speaking truths, to mouths like mine at least." In the *Newsletter*, we like to include the art of editorial cartoons to speak truths that are sometimes hard to put into words. Health physicist Al Goodwyn is a regular contributor of cartoons to the *Newsletter* and is also an editorial cartoonist for *The Aiken Standard*. This month we get to learn a little more about him.

Newsletter: When did you first start drawing cartoons?

Goodwyn: I always liked to doodle and usually drew cartoon-type doodles. As far as my start at drawing real (as in published) cartoons, there are two unlikely individuals involved in my cartooning career: Bud Grace and Mike Tyson. When I joined the Health Physics Society in 1986 Bud Grace was providing syndicated cartoons for the *Newsletter*. Grace's cartoons were dropped in 1988 (due to several that were controversial, as I recall). Lew Pitchford, who was the editor at that time, put out a call for interested health physicists to provide cartoons. Feeling that my sense of humor was above average, I sent him a batch and

have been providing cartoons for the *Newsletter* ever since. My first paid cartoon was for the *Newsletter* and it was quite a thrill to get a check for drawing silly pictures.

Moving ahead to July of 1997, Mike Tyson bites the ear of Evander Holyfield and the boxing world is in an outrage. Don't get me wrong, I'm a boxing fan but I wasn't as shocked as most that blood was drawn in a boxing match. I didn't recall as much outrage over Tyson's wife-beating incidents or rape conviction. The situation was ripe for a cartoon. I drew one up and pitched it to our local paper, *The Aiken Standard*. They were encouraging but a little lukewarm on the idea of buying cartoons from me since the syndicates provided them so cheap. It surprised me a little that they weren't eager to print my cartoon. Not willing to give up, I provided them several batches on local issues. They enjoyed these and asked me to continue providing cartoons. Since then I've provided three cartoons each week. Incidentally, they eventually printed the Tyson cartoon.

Newsletter: Did you have any classes or formal training?

Goodwyn: I've never had formal

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training, which many will say is obvious. Looking back at some of my early cartoons you'd see that they're more humorous than artistic . . . okay, a lot more humorous than artistic . . . all right, not artistic but with a glimmer of humor. I love drawing cartoons and will probably never stop. With the drive and the obligation to provide several cartoons each week, my artistic ability became self taught over time.

Newsletter: Did you ever get in trouble in grade school and high school for doodling?

Goodwyn: I recall getting in trouble only once. When I was a junior in high school I doodled a picture of Miss Merrill, my accounting teacher. She didn't appreciate the doodle or my lack of diligence at accounting.

Newsletter: Did you ever consider going into art instead of health physics?

Goodwyn: I never considered art as a career. Believe it or not I went through my first two years of college working on a business major. I should have taken Miss Merrill's advice a little sooner. I changed my major to physics during my junior year. I was interested in nuclear physics so when I graduated that was the direction I was leaning. A good match was found at the Savannah River Plant working for DuPont in the external dosimetry and calibration group. Since then I've had quite a few challenging health physics-related assignments at the Savannah River Site (formerly Plant).

Newsletter: Where do you get your ideas?

Goodwyn: For *The Aiken Standard* I have a set, weekly routine. I start with about ten possible topics for a batch of cartoons. I sit down with associated newspaper clippings on those topics, whittle the number down to around three, and find an angle that I think will effectively present my opinion. Once the idea is firmed up, the easy, and most enjoyable, part is next—drawing the cartoon. Lastly I deliver the batch to the managing editor, usually by 6:00 p.m. Sunday.

For the *Newsletter*, I write down ideas as they come to me (in some cases my coworkers have provided some pretty good ideas—and fodder—for cartoons), file them, and, when I get some time, pull those ideas out and work up some cartoons. I enjoy seeing my cartoons in the *Newsletter*, but I have to admit that it still amazes me when I draw up a batch for the paper and see them in print over the next few days.

Newsletter: What is your favorite subject to draw about and why?

Goodwyn: The cartoons that appeal to me most are those



Al Goodwyn

that quickly get the message across, use the fewest words possible, and minimize the use of detail in the cartoon's background . . . since I'm not very good at drawing detail in the cartoon's background. I've done quite a few cartoons dealing with risk comparisons. Radiation hazards are often overblown when compared to everyday risks that we accept. In the world of editorial cartoons, Bill Clinton is a particularly enjoyable subject. Lately he's been a fairly ripe target and his "situations" have provided plenty of opportunities for me to sharpen his likeness.

Newsletter: What do you consider the most interesting cartoon you have ever drawn?

Goodwyn: I try to go for "funny" or "thought-provoking." I've never thought of my cartoons as interesting. It's even tougher for me to pick the most interesting one. I guess those that I find "interesting" would be those that generate some controversy.

It's interesting that a cartoon can excite people into expressing an opinion of their own. My first experience of this was a cartoon that appeared in the October 1994 issue of the *Newsletter*. The cartoon showed a motorcyclist discussing the risks of "nuclear stuff" while partaking in several voluntary risks such as drinking, smoking, and riding without a helmet. Shortly after that I got a lengthy letter from a motorcyclist who expressed concern that I had stereotyped motorcyclists as "illiterate, beer-guzzling NIMBY's." It was clearly not my intention to offend anyone or any group. I sent him a letter back stating so and received a follow-up response stating that his letter may have been sent in haste. I really appreciated his response back but it did get me thinking of the different messages that cartoons can send. Luckily this first taste of formal criticism didn't cause me to overanalyze gags for future cartoons.

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As an editorial cartoonist there have been occasions where individuals took enough offense at a cartoon to write a letter to the editor. I think this is a big part of what editorial cartoons are about. The same freedom that lets me portray Clinton in an embarrassing situation (or expand on his own embarrassing situations) is the same freedom that lets others blast me on the editorial page. With each letter I ask myself if I should have drawn the cartoon any differently. I have yet to answer "yes"; in fact, I get a feeling of accomplishment when I've motivated someone to counter my opinion.

On a related note, if you're in the south and drawing editorial cartoons, you may want to stay away from topics such as the confederate flag, trailers . . . oops, I mean manufactured housing . . . and the Atlanta Falcons. And don't take that as a stereotype of southerners. [Editor's note: Goodwyn was born in Edgefield, South Carolina, and now lives in Aiken, South Carolina.]



Drew, Marcia, Rachel, and Sam Goodwyn.

Newsletter: What does your family think of your cartooning? Do you do special drawings for them?

Goodwyn: My wife Marcia and I have been married for 14 years. She's been very supportive of this hobby and even lets me bounce my ideas off her. Our kids have seen me do this most of their lives so there's very little novelty in it for them. Rachel, who is ten, is the oldest, Drew is

eight, and Sam is three. Drew is the most likely to continue with cartooning. He's much more motivated at drawing than I was at his age. The only special request was from Drew recently who asked me to draw a cartoon of a dead tiger for his teacher. His teacher is an over-enthusiastic Clemson University fan. I was more than willing to take on that assignment.

Newsletter: Do you have cartoons regularly published anywhere else?

Goodwyn: I'm working on a few side projects related to cartooning. I recently provided illustrations for a book to be published that contains regional stories. I'm working with several individuals in the community on children's material to promote traffic safety. For several years I provided health physics-related cartoons to the *NRRPT News*.

And I recently began providing editorial cartoons for *The Star*, a weekly local newspaper.

When he isn't creating cartoons, Goodwyn is the Manager of the Health Physics Technology-Technical Support Group at the Savannah River Site. He has been an active member of the Health Physics Society since 1986. In the Savannah River Chapter he has served as president and has been chairman of the Nomination Committee, the Program Committee, the Membership Committee, and the 1990 Southeast Regional HPS Chapters Meeting Publicity Committee.

