

On My Mind
2/11/00

Does the CNMI really need two (mostly) English-language daily newspapers? Even Honolulu, with many thousands of more inhabitants, is about to lose its second paper. So isn't a second paper here a redundancy, a waste of time and money?

I don't think so. The CNMI's two dailies, the <I>Variety</I> and the <I>Tribune</I>, have vastly different points of view. Reading only one can give readers a rather unbalanced picture of current events. Often, that's evident just from a look at the headlines of the two papers. Take, for example, the story last week about a legislative hearing on the Washington Rep's office.

The <I>Variety</I> headline reads: "House leadership consults Babauta on funding issues." The <I>Tribune</I> headline, on the other hand, reads: "Office of Washington Rep faces House inquiry." There's a considerable difference between "being consulted" about something, and "facing an inquiry!" The text of the articles, moreover, confirms that the headlines weren't just careless wording. The <I>Variety</I> story is positive and supportive; the <I>Tribune</I> story is hostile and unfriendly. Those who read only one paper would have been left with vastly different impressions of how the legislature views the Washington Rep. Those who read both might have been confused, but at least they would know that opinion on the subject is not unanimous. That's one reason two papers are better than one - at least here in the CNMI.

Yet reading only the paper that seems in sympathy with one's point of view is no guarantee that the particular paper will contain everything of interest to that point of view. There is, as is to be expected, considerable overlap between the papers - both in their local news coverage and in the wire stories they carry. But there is an equally considerable discrepancy in the editorial, opinion, op-ed columns they carry - particularly the syndicated ones. In my opinion, the <I>Tribune</I> does a far better job on that score than does the <I>Variety</I>. That's a second reason two papers are better than one.

And even though we know that the <I>Tribune</I> favors the garment industry, that bias does appear to lead it to run more articles about topics of concern to the garment industry - about the labor issue, about the economic picture here and abroad, about the position of various U.S. government leaders - an education in itself. That's a third reason.

One more reason: unlike places that may have only one newspaper - but do have a multiplicity of tv and cable stations together with their several news services - the CNMI does not have a access to alternate sources for news. There is only one cable tv station to supplement the newspapers. Though there is promise of a 24-hour news station on radio, it is not yet reality.

In fact, I would argue that even two newspapers are not enough for the CNMI. I think the CNMI could use a third newspaper - one that came out weekly instead of daily so that its reporters wouldn't be so preoccupied frantically hunting for stories that any item, no matter how trivial, story would do, but could take the time to present longer, more thoughtful views on the larger issues faced by the CNMI; one that would be less biased by the big business interests of the two

existing papers; one that just might try a little harder to serve as a model for good writing, good reporting.

But would it sell? Ay, there's the rub.

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The same question could be asked of eco-tourism: will it sell? An eco-tourism symposium, with some 100 delegates expected, will take place on Rota the end of this month. Ironically enough, word has it that in order to accommodate the participants, land clearing was done that destroyed valuable natural habitat.

Eco-tourism is a combination of two words: ecology, and tourism. Ecology, in my <I>American Heritage College Dictionary</I>, is defined as the relationship between organisms and their environment, or the study of that relationship. Another definition is: the study of the detrimental effects of modern civilization on the environment. Tourism is quite simply defined as the business of providing tours and tourist services.

The challenge of eco-tourism is how to accommodate groups of tourists (people who travel for pleasure) while still protecting the environment. It almost seems a contradiction in terminology.

How can one protect the environment when it is exposed, on a daily basis, to hundreds of tourists?

A conference on ecological tourism held in Pohnpei in 1991 defined eco-tourism as a kind of tourism that "(1) is based upon relatively undisturbed natural areas; (2) is non-damaging, non-degrading; (3) is a direct contributor to the continued protection and management of the natural areas used, and (4) is subject to an adequate and appropriate management regime."

Explained one of the speakers, Peter Valentine, a senior lecturer from Queensland, Australia, "The motives of ecotourists are primarily to enjoy nature; perhaps to learn but certainly to appreciate the beauty and interests of nature. If tourism occurs in heavily modified environments (Waikiki, Las Vegas, Guam) is not ecotourism."

Destroying wildlife, dumping waste, polluting water - even taking too many natural products - all of which harm the environment - do not qualify as eco-tourism, he said.

"If it is genuine ecotourism, there has to be a mechanism for the tourists to contribute to the long term protection of nature....What is needed is a way for some of the funds from the tourists to be used to manage properly the area visited." He cites as example, using fees from divers to install mooring buoys for dive boats.

Is this the definition of eco-tourism that will be discussed at the Rota conference? Will it sell?

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I should have known, when Kumoi's campaign for office drew no fiery letters to the editor, no damning ads, not a single accusatory fax, that Guy Gabaldon was not on island. Not only was he not on island then, but he has, I've been told, left island altogether, apparently for health reasons. With - so far as I am aware - not a single tribute, or ceremony, or notice of any kind. And that's a pity. He was a colorful figure, and it doesn't seem right for his departure to have gone unnoted, unobserved.

Gabaldon, a former Marine, was a World War II hero, responsible for the capture of large numbers of Japanese soldiers during the American battle for Saipan. He received wide recognition - as well as military honors - for the feat, of which he remained inordinately proud ever after. Nor did he let anyone forget the fact. He was fiercely loyal to the United States, and often criticized the people of the CNMI for not being more so.

At one point or other during his stay on Saipan, he flew charter flights to the Northern Islands, set up a fishing base on Pagan, started a boys' camp on Aguigan - creative, innovative projects that as often as not did not fully conform to CNMI laws and regulations. On occasion, he would offer strident commentary on some government decision or other. At one point, he was so concerned with management of DPS that offered his services as Commissioner of Police.

He made his opinions known, objected to official concerns about his operations, with letters to the editor, faxes to assorted recipients, sometimes even ads in the paper. One of his faxes was entitled "a report by Citizens Against Uneducated Commonwealth Officials (CADUCO)." His communications reflected a stereotypical Marine background - they were strongly worded, made free use of usually censored words, and often turned around to accuse those who would attack him with themselves breaking the law. He was not afraid to name names, to take on agency heads, legislative leaders, the governor himself. One of his favorite targets was "Kumoi."

As recently as 1997, he wrote, in one of his broadcast faxes: "Come on, Teno, I and everyone who voted for you want to believe that we did the right thing - that you can still kick ass and get rid of the scum-bags who are kissing your coat-tails, and who will take over if not thrown out on their duffs immediately."

Outrageous, controversial, exaggerated as some of his statements - and actions - were, in his own maverick way, Guy Gabaldon deserves a lot of respect. He was afraid of no one, he did not hesitate to voice his opinions, he cared about Saipan youth, he believed in truth and honesty and justice and good government, he was as loyal a friend as he was fearsome a critic. He deserved a formal farewell.

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In case you hadn't heard: a memorial service for MCV cameraman Tony Cobb will be held on Monday, February 14, at the station, located on the 2nd floor of the Nauru building. Tony died of renal cancer at his home in Florida earlier this week.

