

On My Mind

6/9/00

A vice-principal and two security staff were sent to Hopwood Junior High school by PSS this past week in an effort to restore peace and order. Staff members at the school had been so unhappy with an alleged lack of discipline, among other things, that they had petitioned for removal of the principal from the school. From all accounts, the presence of these additional three staff has indeed turned the tide. Peace and order have been restored. "...there has been significant changes (sic). The kids are at their rightful class and no loitering," a *Variety* article quotes a Board member as saying.

Which just goes to prove, it seems to me, that the problem at Hopwood was not so much what the principal did or did not do, as it was what the administration of the Public School System did or did not do.

The question is, if all it took to address the problem was the assignment of more support staff, and if, apparently, such support staff was available for appointment to Hopwood, why did it take so long? Why was the situation allowed to deteriorate so badly as to prompt staff protest before PSS Central decided to act?

In my opinion, those who have maligned Lourdes Mendiola owe her an apology. She may have her shortcomings, but the problems at Hopwood were clearly more than one short-staffed principal should have been expected to handle on her own.

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Word wars and journalistic rivalries notwithstanding, on at least one front, there is no contest. The *Tribune* is easily the winner. *Tribune*, at least, is on the web, and maintaining its web presence on a daily basis.

The *Variety*, on the other hand, despite its claims to be "Micronesia's leading newspaper," does not. It did, for a time, but has since backed off from its attempt to also maintain a site on the web.

And that's unfortunate, because as a result, people who browse the web could easily get a rather unbalanced view of the CNMI. Whether it's the efficiency of the search engines or the ingenuity and persistence of the individual searcher is not clear, but the fact remains that CNMI or Saipan searches manage to bring up even so tangential a web page as this one.

Prospective teachers, job-searching pharmacists, curious travelers, even people seeking long-lost friends have found my web page and sent me e-mail asking for information and assistance. Thus, there is every reason to believe that people who browse the web are also finding the *Tribune* pages in their search. The *Tribune* even has a spot on saipan.com's home page. Ordinarily that would, at most, elicit a comment about how enterprising the *Tribune* publisher is.

However, given that the <I>Tribune</I> is as opinionated - to put it kindly - as it is, the fact that the <I>Tribune</I> but not the <I>Variety</I> has an on-line page should be cause for concern. It is true that there is considerable government-supplied CNMI information on the web. But government-supplied information can be tainted by political considerations, by economic interests, even by a single agency's self interest. Newspapers, on the other hand, are generally considered to supply neutral, unbiased information - outside of its editorial pages, that is.

It would behoove the <I>Variety</I> to reconsider establishing an on-going presence for itself on the web, not only for the sake of its own visibility, but also for the sake of the CNMI.

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Nearly three years ago, I moved to what some have called a tree-house. Most of its rooms put me at eye level to the branches of pine, flametree, coconut and breadfruit trees, the upper reaches of banana plants.

From my tree house, I've discovered coconut tree flowers, watched those phallic sprouts on breadfruit trees open up to reveal young breadfruit, and just this past month, learned that banana flowers, before ending up at the end of the bunch of bananas, actually harbor embryonic bananas under their petals. And I've been fascinated by the tiny birds (reed warblers?) who flutter like humming birds at the flowery ends of the new bananas.

What I haven't yet discovered is why my flame tree doesn't have seed pods as other flame trees do, and why only some of the coconut trees in my yard sprout coconuts. Guess I should try look it up on the web.....