

The Hustler Chronicles

By GAYNELLE DOLL

Illustrations by JIM HSIEH

Student journalists trade sleep, top grades and summers abroad for the thrill of getting the story.

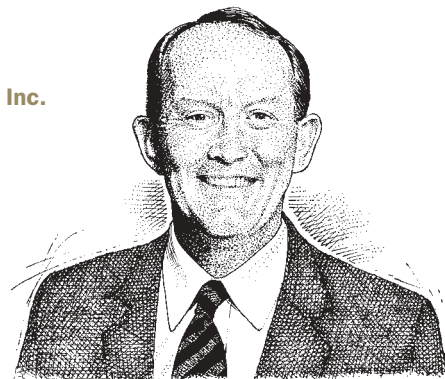


Enfield Ford, BA'50

Former director of corporate creative services, Time-Warner Inc.

Vanderbilt majors: business administration and economics

Hustler cartoonist, 1946-50



Lamar Alexander, BA'62

Currently running for U.S. Senate; former Tennessee governor; former U.S. secretary of education

Vanderbilt major: Latin American studies

Hustler editor, 1961-62



Roy Blount, BA'63

Humorist, sportswriter, performer, author of 12 books

Vanderbilt major: English

Hustler editor, 1962-63

For more than 40 years now, newspaper readership by Americans has been in a slow decline. With cable television and the Internet feeding them a steady diet of up-to-the-minute news, many Americans no longer make a habit of reading a daily paper over morning coffee or after dinner—particularly the 18- to 25-year-olds coveted by advertisers. The sad tale of century-old newspapers shutting down their presses has been repeated in cities across the nation.

Futurists who have gone so far as to predict the eventual extinction of newspapers might have second thoughts if they had witnessed a scene at Vanderbilt last fall. At the annual Organization Fair, during which students—mostly freshmen—get information about hundreds of opportunities to join everything from Ducks Unlimited to the Vanderbilt Speculative Fiction Society, more than 500 students signed cards indicating their interest in working on the *Vanderbilt Hustler*.

The majority of those who express interest each year soon become overwhelmed by writing papers and preparing for exams and having a life so that visions of getting a *Hustler* byline quickly fade—but for a surprising number of students, the *Hustler* becomes the defining Vanderbilt experience, more important than top grades, the start of a lifelong career.

“I wrote a lot of words for the *Hustler*, banging out long editorials late at night when I didn’t have to be careful and write what someone else wanted me to write,” says humorist Roy Blount, BA’63, one of Vanderbilt’s most famous *Hustler* editors and the author of 12 books. “I think it’s good when you’re young to do a lot of whatever it is you hope to do in the future. Freedom to write what I pleased, an important subject and deadlines—

that is a great combination of three things that enable you to work out and build up your chops.”

The *Vanderbilt Hustler*, which printed its first issue only five years after the University’s 1873 founding, exists without benefit of ties to any journalism program—or, since 1998, any subsidies from the University. *Hustler* staffers take pride in the fact that, unlike student newspapers at most universities, the *Hustler* is 100 percent financially self-sufficient, paying for printing, rent for the space it occupies in the Sarratt Center, and small salaries for its advertising and editorial staff.

Students like Emily Abbott, editor of the *Hustler* during the spring 2002 semester, and Jennifer Whatley, editor for two semesters prior to Abbott, acknowledge that working 60 to 70 hours a week on the paper means sleep deprivation and a lower grade point average—for pay that averages out to be less than they could make walking across 21st Avenue South and working at Starbucks. But the rewards are worth it. By becoming involved in the most important issues in the life of the University, students who work on the *Hustler* bring information to fellow students, speak out in print when they see the University taking, in their view, a wrong turn, and become chroniclers of Vanderbilt’s history and zeitgeist.

“There’s a certain pride that goes with walking to class and seeing someone reading your article,” says Abbott. “Working on the *Hustler* has taught me how to deal with a wide variety of people. It’s taught me to wade through what’s important and what’s not. And it teaches you how to deal with mistakes.”

“I’ve definitely learned more working on the *Hustler* than I did in any class,” says Whatley. “I’ve crossed

FROM THE HUSTLER

OCTOBER 5, 1893

A question which stares us in the face right now, and which cannot be settled at any other time, is whether or not we are going to have a football team. ... It is now two weeks since college opened, and there have never yet been enough candidates on the field to make two practice elevens. What sort of team can we develop under such circumstances? You might as well expect a man to swim with nothing to swim in. ... Shall our friends turn away sick with mortification and shame over the pitiable exhibition we make of ourselves, or shall we make them doubly and trebly our friends by showing them that there is the true stuff in us? ... Shall we endure the taunts and jeers of our ancient enemy [Sewanee] without even the poor excuse of the umpire to blame for our wretched failure? ... Are you helping to expose your college to ridicule and disgrace, perhaps from purely selfish reasons—more likely from laziness?

paths with people I never would have met otherwise. I can call up administrators on campus and catch up on things. It’s nice to walk around campus and know who the deans are, to recognize the important players.”

The position of *Hustler* editor has long been and remains one of the most powerful roles available to Vanderbilt students. Chris Crain, BA’87, now editorial director and chief operating officer of Window Media, was *Hustler* editor his sophomore year and editor of *Ver-sus* his junior year. “I remember [Associate Provost of Student Affairs] Johan Madson telling me how Van-

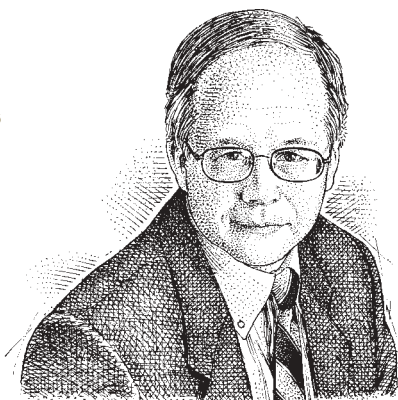


T. Van Magers, BA'66

Special agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Vanderbilt major: mathematics

Hustler sports editor, 1964-66



Terry Eastland, BA'71

Publisher, *The Weekly Standard*

Vanderbilt major: philosophy

Hustler reporter, 1968-71



Mary Louise Elson, BA'74

Associate managing editor for features, *Chicago Tribune*

Vanderbilt major: English

Hustler editor, 1973-74

derbilt administrators would all swallow hard before they walked in the office on Tuesdays and Friday mornings, the days the *Hustler* came out, because they didn't know what was going to be in there," says Crain.

"I was always a thorn in Joe B. Wyatt's side. He was fairly new, and I would write about how he wasn't interacting with students enough. I tried a thousand different ways to get him to do an interview, but he had not given an interview to anyone in the Vanderbilt student press," Crain remembers.

Finally, Crain showed up in Wyatt's office and refused to leave until he got an interview. "His secretary threatened to call security. I said fine, I'll call my photographer and we'll do a story about it. Finally, after about three hours, Eliot Frankel, who was then head of public affairs, came down and said, 'You'll get your interview—now get out of here,'" Crain says.

On Commencement day, as Crain walked across the stage to receive his diploma, he recalls, "Chancellor Wyatt shook my hand and said he wished me very well in the future and added that he'd never been happier to see someone graduate—which I took as a respectful compliment."

From the *Hustler's* early years, when editorials advocated Vanderbilt's separation from the Methodist Church, up until today, when writers speak out against racial graffiti and report on the proposed move to a residential college system, the paper has been a forum for thought, railing against the atrocities of war, advocating improved opportunities for women and minorities and, always, arguing both for and against the eternal Greek system.

OCTOBER 4, 1929

Sisterly love is being manifested in its usual cut-throat manner early this fall. At one sorority house two dainty brunettes are pulling hair over a blonde swain. One has the advantage of having been the most constant companion of the man in question last year, while the other siren has stepped in to break up the once happy home. ...

Some of us may think we rate sitting in the seats of the mighty, but few of us presume so far as to eat there; unlike the boy and girl seen eating lunch serenely, deep in conversation, at the family table in Kissam one day. The girl was new—so that lets her out, but there really was no excuse for the boy, since he is a senior and a Sigma Chi and should know his cafeterias by now.

The Editor as Catalyst

Blount and Lamar Alexander, BA'62, two southerners who attended Vanderbilt when it was still an all-white school taking its first wobbly steps toward integration, both served as editor during their senior years. Alexander, with the encouragement of then-chancellor Harvie Branscomb, who was struggling to convince a reluctant Board of Trust of the need for integration, wrote a series of editorials calling for Vanderbilt to desegregate—at a time when the majority of the student body and the Student Senate favored preserving the status quo.

"The majority of Vanderbilt students were from the South back then," Alexander remembers. "Desegregation was a very unpopular point of view. I wasn't harassed, but I was considered a troublemaker for raising an issue a lot of people thought I had no business raising. People regarded it as unnecessary, almost impolite."

Blount, whose work for the *Hustler* included a column recounting his experience going on a sit-in with civil rights activist John Lewis, brushes aside any suggestion that *Hustler* editors had a sense of doing something historic. "At that age I figured I'd be doing something historical all my life," he says with characteristic self-effacement. "It was the black kids from Fisk and Atlanta who were making history, sitting at lunch counters and riding buses and getting beat up. There was all sorts of media attention on 'student unrest' as they called it, and the issues of the day were thrashed out on college campuses."

Bridget Kelley, BA'88, now an editor of National Public Radio's *Morning Edition*, sums up her experience as *Hustler* editor this way: "Vanderbilt was becoming a much more diverse institution, and we worked hard at the paper to try to reflect that, to bring in different voices and also to foster a more inclusive spirit at the University. Black students presented a manifesto of demands. There were incidences of anti-semitism. Whether they were done out of maliciousness or ignorance was not clear at the time; the interpretations were very different. Those were important stories for us and important issues for the University. There were students who did not feel as welcome as others at Vanderbilt. If we had a mission or a goal, it was to encourage Vanderbilt as it worked to become a more diverse university. I was proud of the work that we did, the stories that we wrote, and the editorial coverage that we provided."

Former *Hustler* editor Mary Elson, BA'74, now associate managing editor of features for the *Chicago Tribune*, recalls the student paper covering controversy over a dance for gay students. "There was a lot of intrigue and a big blow-up with the chancellor involving our reporting. We tried to provide a forum for debate. We were crusaders."

OCTOBER 17, 1958 by Lamar Alexander

Moaning freshman men display an almost unanimous condemnation toward the recent cancellation of the traditional Homecoming pajama parade, a disorganized event which has occurred intermittently in Vandy history as long as members of the present administration can recall. ...

Tradition has motivated numerous pajama-clad, song-singing freshman classes to gather at Rand Hall the morning before the Homecoming Game and, with the band and cheerleaders heading the disturbance, descend upon downtown Nashville ...

Last year's "harmless tour" included capricious capers such as kidnapping an LSU cheerleader, emblazoning large and beautiful yellow lettering on large and clean plate glass windows, and coasting up and down Fifth Avenue in grocery carts pilfered permanently from a surprised supermarket staff. All of this unscheduled entertainment landed several of the less fleet students in the local police station.

A Century of Sports Writing

From the days of Grantland Rice a hundred years ago up to the present, the *Hustler* has also been known as a training ground for future sports writers. Today former Vanderbilt sports writers occupy the sports desks at papers across the country, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and a number of others. Many were drawn to Vanderbilt by what is now known as the Fred Russell-Grantland Rice Scholarship for Sports Journalism. Grantland Rice, a 1901 graduate, was one of the most celebrated sportswriters ever. Fred Russell, a letterman for the Commodore baseball team in 1927, wrote for nearly seven decades with the *Nashville Banner*. His name was added to the scholarship in 1986.

Scholarship recipients include Blount, who early in his career wrote for *Sports Illustrated*; Dave Sheinin, BA'91, who covers the Baltimore Orioles for the *Washington Post*; Lee Jenkins, BA'99, who covers UCLA football and basketball at the *Orange County Register*; and Skip Bayless, BA'74, a nationally syndicated columnist who has written for the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and now the *San Jose Mercury News*. Tyler Kepner, BA'97, and Buster Olney, BA'88, both cover sports for the *New York Times*. Kepner is beat writer for the New York Yankees; Olney has covered the Mets, Yankees, and now the Giants.

Former *Hustler* sports writers agree that the discipline of churning out articles for a twice-weekly column is good training for a career in journalism. Terry Eastland,



Chris Crain, BA'87

Editorial director and chief operating officer, Window Media

Vanderbilt major: political science and history

Hustler editor, 1984-85



Bridget Kelley, BA'88

Editor, National Public Radio's Morning Edition

Vanderbilt majors: English and history

Hustler editor, 1986-87

BA'71, is publisher of *The Weekly Standard*. Eastland became interested in Vanderbilt when a guidance counselor at his Dallas high school told him about the Grantland Rice Scholarship. He subsequently applied for and was a runner-up for the scholarship. Despite not winning, Vanderbilt turned out to be a good choice for him.

"A great liberal arts education is a good education for someone who is interested in being a journalist," Eastland says. "If you're going to a university, you ought to spend your time studying English or political science or history or philosophy or foreign language. Journalism is best learned in terms of technique on the job."

At times, sports writing involves larger questions being debated at the University. Mississippi-born T. Van Magers, BA'66, now an FBI special agent, was a *Hustler* sports editor his last two years at Vanderbilt. Most of the time, he says, "We didn't push the envelope. A lot of our sports stories were rah-rah support-the-team stuff."

But in Magers' senior year, Vanderbilt was attempting to recruit a young African American named Perry Wallace to play basketball. "I told Coach Roy Skinner I wanted to interview Perry for the *Hustler*, and he said he really wished I wouldn't. I told him it was a big story. He said, 'Okay, but don't discuss race.' I said, 'That isn't going to be easy.'"

SEPTEMBER 30, 1960 by Roy Blount

The only place in town where you can get a real coffee-house atmosphere and eighteen kinds of coffee is The Tulip Is Black, a little place established this July on 21st Avenue next to the barbershop by Vanderbilt senior Robert Allen and ex-Vandy student Larry Connatser. ... The walls are hung with drawings and paintings; "people come in and hang them up," Allen said. One painting ... is the work of Dr. Eugen Biel-Bienne, a Vanderbilt professor. [It] depicted a couple who seemed to be doing something vaguely unwholesome, but who looked neither healthy enough nor close enough together to be doing anything really reprehensible ...

Anyone who has a musical instrument ... is welcome to entertain, and Allen hopes more Vanderbilt students will come over to pick and/or read [poetry]. ... I ordered caffe espresso and rum cake, having some idea what caffe espresso was and being able to pronounce rum cake ...

Most of the clientele ... looked like the kind of people you would want to be sitting near you in a coffeehouse—authentic-looking, but not way-out. ... Allen volunteered the information that "some pretty exotic people" frequent the place. "They're not beatniks, not really crazy, but bohemians," he elucidated. ... Allen said only once, when a patron took a swing at a Vanderbilt football player who insulted him, was there any trouble.

Magers interviewed Wallace and wrote about a black man considering Vanderbilt four years after the student body had voted not to admit black students. "I didn't show up at the athletic department after that," he adds.

"A couple weeks later I got a call from Coach Skinner saying Perry Wallace was going to announce his college choice that day. I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, and then he added, 'He's coming to Vanderbilt, and he told me your *Hustler* article played a role in his decision.'"

Wallace, of course, went on to enjoy great success in his basketball career and broke down racial barriers at Vanderbilt and elsewhere. Now a law professor at the Washington College of Law of American University, he received Vanderbilt's Bachelor of Ugliness Award, presented annually to the most popular male student.

For Love and Money

All this is not to claim that *Hustler* staffers have such weighty issues as their sole motivation. Lamar Alexander was passionate about the issues of the day, to be sure, but he had another motive as well. Working to pay his \$600 a year tuition, not only did he sell cigarettes and magazines and wash dishes, but as *Hustler* editor, he and the business editor were allowed to split any profits.

"The first issue we put out while I was editor was six pages," Alexander recalls. "Aside from a picture of a cheerleader on the front, most of it was ads. Dean Babbitt called me into his office and said, 'Lamar, this isn't exactly what we had in mind for the campus newspaper.'"

"While we were dealing with civil rights issues, we were also dealing with lots of trivial stuff," says Blount. "It was a lot of fun. The *Hustler* offices in those days were in Alumni Hall. I remember one time while I was a junior and Lamar Alexander was editor, we were there putting the paper to bed. Lamar had come back from a tour of Latin America during the summer and written a column called 'Joe College Meets José Collegio.' He had heard all these revolutionary speeches, and he went out on the little balcony of Alumni Hall and harangued the campus in Spanish."

Student journalists can also be given to flights of fancy on the printed page. "I remember once I put a story about a Phi Psi falling out the window on the front page because I thought it would be cool to use the word 'defenestrate' in a headline," says Crain. "The Greek students felt we were always running negative things about them," he adds.

For some *Hustler* staffers, late nights and countless hours spent working on the paper have led to romance. "There was a lot of socializing as well as journalism," recalls Elson, who was the first female *Hustler* editor

AUGUST 7, 1973 by Mary Elson

The reaction of college students to Watergate has been less than tumultuous. In fact, it would be hard to characterize any overt display of concern that has surfaced in their ranks—a striking departure from past organized protestations against governmental fiddlings.

Probably the closest assessment is, on the one side, an aloof I-told-you-so gaze by those who were convinced Nixon never was the one, along with an indulgent snicker at the adults squirming over the accountability of a prime leader in their moral camp.

On the other side is a sober, somewhat sheepish retreat by the once wildly ecstatic group who overwhelmingly gave Nixon their all in the November presidential election.

Both reactions are dangerous, because both signify a belief that students really don't have to worry about Watergates until they step through the shell of university life into the real world outside.

(except for World War II, when a woman briefly filled the role while the men were away). "It was a magical combination of things. The kids who worked on the paper were bright and funny and creative. There was a real sense of camaraderie, both intellectual and social. We had the craziest printing operation which involved going to Murfreesboro twice a week. We would be there all night long, then come back and eat at the Campus Grill. There was a famous waitress there named Roxy who knew all our orders by heart."

Her senior year, Elson married another staffer, John Bloom, BA'74, who had come to Vanderbilt on a Grantland Rice Scholarship and went on to write movie reviews as Joe Bob Briggs and host his own cable television series. Elson and Bloom were also friends with Skip Bayless, who was *Hustler* sports editor.

"Skip has become kind of famous as a sports journalist. John and I divorced after a couple of years, and John has become something of a celebrity. Skip and I always joke that we get calls asking to be interviewed about John even now—25 years later, we're still all glued together because of our *Hustler* experience."

Mention staff romances to today's *Hustler* staffers, however, and they're likely to wrinkle their noses. "We've had some staff members who've dated, but some break-ups are bad and you wouldn't want to be in the same office with that person 15 hours a day," says Whatley. "We're together so much it would be kind of like dating your brother or sister. We even have a term for it—Hustlercest."



Sam Feist, BA'91

Executive producer, CNN's *Crossfire*

Vanderbilt major: political science

Hustler political columnist, 1990-91



Jennifer Whatley, BA'02

Vanderbilt major:
English and art history

Hustler editor, Spring 2000–Fall 2001



Emily Abbott, BA'03

Vanderbilt major: English

Hustler editor, Spring 2002

The *Hustler* in 2002

Today's *Hustler* editors are selected for one-semester posts, which gives Peabody students who do senior internships a shot at being editor. Often editors reapply and serve as editor for more than one semester, however.

Both Abbott and Whatley are English majors, but the *Hustler* also attracts students from a wide spectrum of majors and from all four of Vanderbilt's undergraduate schools—Arts and Science, Peabody, Engineering and Blair. Though the *Hustler* mirrors newspaper editorial staffs in most of the country in being overwhelmingly white, its advertising staff for 2001-2002 included African American, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani students. Two of its business managers in the last five years have been African American women.

Online capabilities have also brought changes, for good or ill. Most communications between *Hustler* staff members now take place via e-mail. "Our Web presence has become increasingly important," says Abbott. "It enables us to be a part of Viewwire, a wire service that allows other publications to pick up our articles and get Vanderbilt's name out there. It also enables alumni and parents to see the paper. People in Vanderbilt student government check the *Hustler* as soon as it goes up online to see if there's anything about their organizations in there."

The *Hustler's* Web site is also interactive. "After we ran a negative review about a country singer and his fan club found out about it, our Web page was flooded with comments, some of them threatening," Abbott adds. "The Web has caused people who would never have thought of the *Vanderbilt Hustler* to get mad at us or praise us."

Today, as ever, editors can differ from the student body in what they view as priorities for the University. And emotions about Greek coverage can still run high. Earlier this year, after the *Hustler* ran an opinion piece calling for the elimination of the Greek system, says Abbott, "We received a dozen letters in response the first day and probably more than 30 letters in a two-week span. But our coverage of incidents of racist graffiti got only two letters. Sections of the campus were being threatened by the acts of a coward, and I thought the best way to get rid of that would be peer pressure from the community saying, 'We're not going to have this in our community.' But the response from students was disappointing."

Chris Carroll, director of student media for Vanderbilt Student Communications Inc., is one of three advisers for VSC, which encompasses eight organizations including the *Hustler*, WRVU Radio and *Versus*. VSC was formed in 1967 when University officials sought to sep-

arate student media from the regular departmental structure at Vanderbilt in order to limit liability. A former journalist, Carroll just finished a term as president of College Media Advisers, an association of about 750 advisers to colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada.

"Vanderbilt's student journalists don't approach their jobs like those I've seen at some student papers where their biggest splash is whatever dirt they dig up for the sake of sensationalism. Vanderbilt students have a sense of community—they want to do things that somehow better the environment here. When they look at things like the restructuring of student life or diversity issues, it's with genuine interest, not just a knee-jerk reaction."

The downside, Carroll maintains, is that they reflect the student body's overall emphasis on conformity. "For the most part Vanderbilt students don't challenge or question. They may shy away from covering something if they're afraid they'll upset people or they'll go too far or it's none of their business. I tell them, 'If you don't, who will?'"

The Thrill of Being at the Center

We made lots of mistakes doing the *Hustler*, certainly, and we made people mad, too," Kelley reflects. "We had occasional run-ins with student government, with faculty, and with administration. One thing that hasn't changed for me is the thrill of being in the center of the story and tracking developments and communicating information in a clear and accurate and concise way."

Sam Feist, BA'91, worked on the *Hustler* from his first semester on, and during his senior year, as political columnist, wrote a series of editorials addressing issues of race and condemning Vanderbilt's willingness to have a trustee who belonged to a country club that excluded members from certain racial and religious groups.

Now, as executive producer of CNN's *Crossfire*, Feist still enjoys being at the center of the day's most important issues. "I think we did an excellent job of covering the news at Vanderbilt, and it gave me a great foundation for a journalism career," says Feist. In hiring producers at CNN, Feist confesses to having a bias toward people with a liberal arts background.

"Journalism is about writing and editing," he says. "Journalists by nature have to know a little about everything—science, history, politics. I can teach someone about writing for television, but I can't educate them about the world."

"Vanderbilt was an incredible background because the English department was without peer," says Enfield "Flicky" Ford, BA'50, former director of corporate cre-

SEPTEMBER 7, 1990 by Sam Feist

I am white, I'm blue-eyed, I'm blond-haired; I look every bit the part of a conservative Vanderbilt student. But I am also a Jew.

I am doubtful I could be accepted at Belle Meade or any number of other clubs. Is it because they are church groups? I don't think so. They are simply organizations which have never had the courage to change the way that things have always been. People who consider the status quo acceptable are cowards and hypocrites—hypocrites unless they come right out and admit they are prejudiced and anti-Semitic.

In am optimistic that our generation will be the one to push for change. These country clubs have continued to operate as if there was never a civil rights movement at all. Change must come; there are people in almost every club who want things to be different. It is these people who must continue to stand up for what they believe and fight for change.

ative services for Time-Warner Inc. As *Hustler* cartoonist, Ford created a character named Danny Mite, a play on the old fight song "Dynamite."

Ford has spent his entire career in publishing, both on the visual and editorial sides. He was on the launch team for both *People* magazine and Home Box Office. As the veteran of many changes in publishing, he remains an optimist about the future of print.

"Newspapers today are suffering, of course," Ford observes. "People are not reading as much; they're watching instead. But there will always be a need to read. We need the contemplation value of print, and the use of language in print."

And there will always be those who want to provide it, Ford says. "The business of writing and illustrating is right in front of you. You're only as good as the next thing you turn out. You can't rest on your laurels. It's a new day and a blank piece of paper every day."

"My favorite job ever was being editor of the *Hustler*," says Crain. "It was a great group of people who could ask tough questions of people in authority and feel they were being taken seriously and could make a difference. I loved walking around the Wall and seeing people reading the *Hustler* on Tuesday and Friday. I felt I was helping them know what was going on around them. I have an emotional reaction just thinking about it."

"Sometimes I wish I had a weekly newspaper now and had to fill half of it every Wednesday night," Blount says, "but I think I'm too tired now." ▼

Gaynelle Doll is the associate editor of this magazine.