



Counting blessings

By Victoria Caudle
Founder, Huckleberry Press

As I take inventory this morning of my blessings, I decided it was a good day to revisit one of the most defining chapters in my life. A review of the very first issue of *Huckleberry Press* over a hot cup of coffee seemed like a warm and perfect way to start the day.

This Thanksgiving will mark seventeen years when the notion entered my head to give my community a publication.

Fruitland Valley in the shadow of the Huckleberry Mountains was exactly where I wanted to be; but, everyone else in the world seemed so far away.

I had this itch to reach out and connect my little town with the other wonderful communities of the Inland Northwest. I wanted to lessen the distance between the neighbors and friends I hadn't yet met, I wanted every Mom and Pop business to have the chance to advertise affordably, and I wanted to give surrounding communities the opportunity to draw in visitors to their events who otherwise may not have attended. I wanted the friendships to flow between communities and flourishing business to be the byproduct.

Being a newspaper reporting on events that had already happened didn't seem as useful as a paper dedicated to spreading the word about what was going to happen. It mattered to me to make as big a difference as I could in the lives of others. I thought about this long and hard. I didn't want to

take peoples' money; I wanted to give back. I wanted to give people value. I wanted people to feel good and to grow.

Knowing full well what a commitment a newspaper would require, it took five full years before I made the leap.

My beloved parents, Charles and Olivia Cook, and my husband, Doug, were my biggest cheerleaders. When I shared the idea with my parents in 1998, they drove up to Washington from Texas, loaded me in the car, took me to Spokane, and purchased the first Huckleberry computer, printer, business phone, filing cabinet, and office supplies to get me started. The Compaq computer my Dad chose was a blinding 256k and the printer was a dot matrix. My Dad also bought me dial-up Internet equivalent to two tin cans and a string and helped me set up my first e-mail account which I still use today.

Five years later in 2003, Doug gave me the encouraging nudge off the cliff I needed to put my dream in motion. Knowing he would still be there come what may, I had the green light I needed to proceed with the paper.

The notion for the name "*Huckleberry Press*" came from the thinking that when all the good juice is squeezed out of a ripe fruit, a press is used. In envisioning a newspaper that could deliver the essence and flavor of life in the Huckleberry Mountains, a huckleberry press seemed

appropriate. The name has come to signify a style of life and state of mind in the Inland Northwest found nowhere else.

The moment it hit me that the paper was something real is a moment I will never forget. I printed 300 flyers off my dot matrix printer announcing the upcoming debut of the paper. I paid Roy and Angel Rae (who were small children at the time) \$5.00 each to pass a flyer out to everyone attending the 2003 Hunters Annual 4-H and Community Fair. They did a thorough job. Every man, woman, and child at the fair that day was holding a flyer. But, the defining moment came when Paul Elliott of Hunters, Washington, looked at the flyer, looked at me, and said, "*Huckleberry Press*, huh?"

You could have knocked me over with a feather. Mr. Elliott may not be aware of the indelible dynamics contained within that moment; but, his casual utterance was the first time I heard someone else besides a family member pronounce those words. Life had been breathed into *Huckleberry Press*. There was no turning back now.

In response to Mr. Elliott, I squared my shoulders, stood up tall, and said, "Yes! *Huckleberry Press*!" It was pedal to the metal from that point forward.

When I perused through the World Premier Issue of *Huckleberry Press* this morning I found myself chuckling fondly, going through the warm memories of the week

before I went to print for the very first issue.

The week before I went to press with the very first issue of *Huckleberry Press* I visited local businesses, announced I was "going to" launch a community paper, and asked business owners to pre-pay for advertising packages -- although I had no sample, no proof, and no evidence of any kind that would guarantee them I wasn't going to abscond with their investment.

But, as a powerful testimony to the wonderful, trusting people of Huckleberry Country -- to the character that makes them so incredibly special -- those business owners who bought advertising believed in me, believed in my vision for my community, and wrote checks for advertising they had no way of knowing they'd ever receive. In three days I had collected enough revenue to pay the overhead for the next six issues and from that day forward, *Huckleberry Press* was dedicated to serving the businesses of Huckleberry Country. I was committed. I told the Lord I was only going to be able to do this with His help, and I vowed to never forget the Lord would be first. In all the years of operating the paper, He made sure we stayed in the black and I never forgot He was in charge.

One day while I was delivering papers, I stopped in Cedonia Church and met with Pastor Ed Dashiell. He gave a blessing over the paper and quoted to me, "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." Zechariah 4:10.

1,000 copies of the September 11, 2003 8-page issue were printed. But, each week we ran out of papers and each week we had to increase the number of papers we were printing. *Huckleberry Press* was quickly becoming no small thing.

Within three months of launching, I started getting calls from people in other communities who said they had picked up a copy of the paper and wanted to know if they could get it in their town. Soon after that, others were picking up stacks and hand-carrying them to other communities.

Flattery definitely got us everywhere. It was fun and exciting to see the paper being gobbled up.

Within the first year I was running crazy. As a one-person show I was on the phone taking ads, putting the paper together, delivering the paper all over kingdom come, writing articles in the wee hours of the morning, typing invoices, and selling ads whenever I could. I literally didn't know whether I was coming or going and I swear I met myself a few times on Addy-Cedonia Road, Hwy 25, and on the Springdale-Reardan Hwy.

In a selfless act of pity, my best friend, Marilyn Newbill, offered to drop off some papers in Colville and Kettle Falls for me. For the next ten years I wouldn't let her quit and she never let me down. Through ice, blizzards, calving season, raising kids, and in sickness and in health, Marilyn got the paper out. We had many more delivery drivers and it enabled me to keep up with the phenomenal growth.

Gratitude doesn't even begin to express my feelings for the many wonderful people who came into my life as a result of *Huckleberry Press*.

Annette Herbert has been my right hand and glue and Vickie Albertsen has been an irreplaceable asset. Wendy Wakefield brought order and system to the office in the early days, and besides her graceful manner and intelligent humbleness, Bonnie Stichart brought a rich dimension to Huckleberry with her writing gift. Amber Young is perhaps the most flexible pinch hitter a manager could ask for, and it was Cris who was the much needed hub when I had to heal. I am so grateful for the hard work and talent of everyone who made Huckleberry into what it is today. Many wonderful delivery people have logged many long hours and miles to get the papers delivered every issue without fail and no one ever let the team down.

To date, there have been 567 issues of *Huckleberry Press* published, bringing the total number of pages of material printed to more than 180 million. Something like that doesn't come together without the hard work, dedication, and sacrifice from some very special people. I've been blessed to have had so many wonderful ambassadors of *Huckleberry Press*.

It's humbling to have been part of a project that has made so broad a connection with so many businesses and communities in the Inland Northwest. It's been a dream realized.

We can plan, but, we still never know just exactly how life is going to pan out. Over the last couple of years Doug and I have had some hard curve balls. We lost five family members, including my beloved Mother and Father, my brother, Lenny, who lost his brave battle with cancer, and two uncles. Despite the toll it took on our health and emotions, Doug and I refused to give up. Our dedicated team never missed a beat getting the paper on the racks. And we

never lost sight of who we were serving.

Last February, we were fortunate to enroll the talent, heart, spirit, and vision of Val Mohny and Chad Minnick in taking over the reins of *Huckleberry Press*.

Val and Chad are revitalizing the mission of *Huckleberry Press* to unite and serve the businesses and communities of the Inland Northwest. As the photo of my coffee table above depicts the contrast between the first simple issue of the paper and the paper's website, they are taking the game up several notches to deliver the best of *Huckleberry Press* in print and in every popular form of digital and social media. When you place an ad with the *Huckleberry Press*, you get a whole lot more than a print ad.

As I move over to allow room for greater leadership, vision, and talent, it brings me great pride to see the direction *Huckleberry Press* is being taken.

Under the blessing of new ownership and guidance the purpose of the paper remains the same: to provide affordable advertising to small business and to connect communities.

Huckleberry Press has come into itself to become a force to be reckoned with and offers an intrinsic value no other paper can -- all because of the people it serves.

If you are a small business owner, please know your concerns are our concerns and we care about every dollar you spend on marketing. We will make your advertising work for you no matter what we have to do. No other paper in the Inland Northwest adds more value at no extra charge. Val and Vickie would love the chance to show you how and why.

If your organization is having an upcoming event, an affordable ad in *Huckleberry Press* can pay for itself by increasing your attendance numbers.

If your town needs effective profile exposure to stimulate your economy, we specialize in showcasing the best your town has to offer and gives readers from other communities good reason to visit.

If you are a reader who enjoys getting involved, we want to engage you. Val and the team have a trunk full of fun ideas that will explore the textures, flavors, hues, and gifts of Huckleberry Country. You won't be disappointed!

This Thanksgiving season I am thankful to be alive, I am thankful for healing, and I am thankful to see a dream turn into something more than I had imagined. It is with a grateful heart I celebrate you, the people of Huckleberry Country.

Anyone wanting to contact me can write me at victoria@huckleberrypress.net. I'd love to hear from you! ❖



Quarry Brown Road, Chewelah by Ethan Gibson. #huckleberrycountry