

Making Headlines:

I was in the supermarket the other day, waiting in the ten items or less line, behind a lady who had at least two dozen items. They were all the same thing so I guess she thought they counted as one. Anyway, that's not what I want to talk about. What I want to talk about is journalism. It so happens that this lady was leafing through the latest issue of one of those check out line tabloids. You know, the kind of paper that frantically reports **"Noah's Ark Found in London Attic!"**

I am interested in this sort of reporting so I paid a visit to my good friend "Scoop" Pressman who runs the Journalism Department over at Upper Peninsula University at Paradise, MI. Not too many people know it but UPUP has graduated quite a few men and women who have gone on to outstanding writing careers. Edward R. Morrow, H.L. Mencken, Bob Woodward, Christiana Amanpour and Theodore Dreiser didn't go there but their books are in the School's Library.

Anyway, what I wanted to know from Scoop is why does the contemporary audience crave crackpot "news" and how can these sensational newspapers publish what they publish and still get away with it. What's up with our generation that we pay for this trash?

Well, Scoop took a long look at me, shook his head from side to side and said, "Take a little walk with me down to the archives. I have some stuff that will make your head spin." I sat down at a long library table with a banker's lamp on it, one of those really cool brass jobs with a green glass shade. After a few minutes my friend came back into the room, his arms piled high with yellowed, vintage newspapers. One issue older than the next. I started with the tabloid on top and when I began to read it you could have knocked me down with the tail feather of a run-over pheasant.

The headline read, **"President Roosevelt Walks! Exclusive Photos Reveal Cruel Hoax."** I looked inside and there they were, several photos of Franklin Roosevelt in a striped bathing suit, prancing in the surf off Catalina Island. Roosevelt could walk! The polio thing was baloney! So what if Franklin's head was obviously pasted on to the body of a young man who was half the president's age. What a great story!

I breathlessly picked up the next one in the stack. The front page illustration showed an alien space ship hovering over the doomed

Titanic, its death ray cutting the huge ocean liner in two. **"That's No Iceberg!"** cried the copy. The space ship looked something like the Civil War ironclad Monitor. Actually, come to think of it, the alien space ship looked exactly like the Monitor. Oh well, never let the details get in the way of a good headline.

The Professor told me to keep going. "It only gets better."

I read a headline from June of 1932. **Nation's Depression Is Bunk! Uncle Sam has Trillions in Secret Swiss Accounts.** Then the paper proudly printed the account numbers 47399012734 and 00498527741 as proof of the unthinkable scam. Damn those Swiss.

Then another. **"Groucho, Chico, Harpo are Karl Marx's Love Children."** The text went on to recount the tale of an impoverished typist by the name of Engels who bore Communism's first progeny. Touching, but it left me wondering about Gummo and Zeppo.

"You see, Ed, there's always been a market for the story that's too big to tell. The story that the Government doesn't want you to know. The story that the fabulously wealthy will do anything to keep out of print. It's a very important part of the journalistic scene. And it always has been." I was beginning to realize that folks like you and me have been swallowing this stuff for years. Joy!

**"Lincoln Look-Alike Assassinated. The President and Mary Lincoln Spotted in Paris."** The astounding news was delivered in a headline from 1863. Apparently the president was up to here with all that states' rights stuff and simply left the mess to Andrew Johnson.

I could tell you a lot more. I saw newspapers going back to Revolutionary Boston that had the skinny on Washington's teeth. But you really should go see for yourself. The next time you're headed somewhere, by way of Paradise, MI take the time to stop in at UPUP, say 'hey' to Scoop and take a look at the archives.

Meanwhile, the next time I'm in line at the supermarket perusing the latest breathless issue of my favorite tabloid I'll feel OK about it. P.T. Barnum was right. There *is* one born every minute.