

July 5, 2007
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Dear Mrs. McCaw:

In your desperation to justify your insulting conduct, you have stumbled across an important truth: we live in different worlds. In my world, to paraphrase our Founders, people have a decent respect for the opinion of others. They play fair. They know they owe something to their community. They believe in the rule of law. If they should have the good fortune to be journalists, they realize their duty to tell both sides (or all sides) of a story. They understand that a newspaper is not a plaything but a public trust.

My world is the United States of America. It is a democratic republic in which ordinary people matter. It is not Wendy's World, in which all that counts are the opinions of a few celebrities and the idle rich. In Wendy's World, a wealthy newspaper owner (you) feels free to smear Jerry Roberts, a most respected journalist, because he rebelled against suppression of the news. In Wendy's World, this owner (you) feels free to smear me—another journalist who is respected within his profession—because I dared to write the truth about the harm you are causing our beloved Santa Barbara.

Mrs. McCaw, what have done with your life that entitles you to smear me? Let me tell you a bit about what I have done. I am 74 years old and retired from *The Washington Post* for nine years. I have won numerous awards. I work for a living, as strange as that might sound to you. In the last two years I have written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, among other newspapers. I have lectured at Stanford, the University of Virginia, and University of California at Santa Barbara. I am completing my ninth book. My previous books include a best-selling biography of Ronald Reagan and a social history of the Los Angeles riots and the Rodney King case. I have four children, six grandchildren, and a great grandchild. One of my grandchildren is in our armed forces. What, other than ownership of a newspaper that you have made a laughing stock, gives you a right to smear me?

On May 13, I wrote a column for the *Los Angeles Times* deploring the decline of the *Santa Barbara News-Press* from the Thomas Storke days when it won a Pulitzer Prize. My column lamented the fate of the paper under your ownership and pointed out that the *News-Press* has lost a greater percentage of circulation than any other newspaper in Southern California.

You replied with a rambling tirade, which the *Los Angeles Times* ran in full on its website. You complained that the *Times* did not run your letter in its print edition, knowing full well that no newspaper runs a letter of that length. Indeed, you do not publish letters critical of you at ANY length in the print edition of the *New-Press* or on its website. Mrs. McCaw, how can you claim the right to be heard while denying this right to others?

I replied to your unjust letter and asked you to publish my letter in the *News-Press*. When you didn't, I gave it to the *Santa Barbara Independent*, which published it, and to the *Los Angeles Times*, which ran it on its website. Mrs. McCaw, let me tell you something. If you want to reach Santa Barbara, give your next column to the *Independent*. It has more readers than the *News-Press*. Since the *Independent* ran my letter, I rarely go down the street or walk on the beach without someone coming up to me and praising me for telling the truth about the *News-Press*.

Mrs. McCaw, I'll bet you a Thanksgiving turkey that I know many more newspaper owners than you do. If you had checked, you could have learned that I have lectured on media issues for many years, including a speech to the American Newspaper Publishers Association. I believe in the free market as much as you do, which is why I am paid for my speeches and columns. I often criticize the media. I deplore publishers who fail the community they serve and editors and reporters who display bias. One of my standard lines in media speeches is that readers and voters are smarter than publishers and politicians think they are. Our democracy is predicated on that view.

There are conflicting models for newspaper ownership. At the high end are *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, newspapers that are publicly traded but family controlled so that the papers can't be snatched away by a stock-buying entrepreneur who would prefer to sell cell phones or shoes. These newspapers invest heavily in their editorial product, take the First Amendment seriously, and have a lower but still healthy profit margin. At the low end are a handful of papers often called counting-house newspapers.

They spend little on editorial content and fill their pages with press releases and wire-service stories. They make money by skimping on the news. That is the model you've chosen, and it's your right. But even counting-house newspapers, except for the *News-Press*, follow basic rules of journalism.

For instance, in violation of these rules, the *News-Press* carried a story in which it reported that two of the charges made against it by the National Labor Relations Board had been dismissed BUT DID NOT REPORT THAT SEVEN OTHER CHARGES WERE BEING PURSUED! One blogger said that this was like giving the score of the losing team and not the winning one. Mrs. McCaw, do you realize that people, including some of your employees, are laughing at you? They are. But I don't find it a laughing matter that you have suppressed the stories about your string of defeats at the hands of the NLRB. Suppressing news in this way is common practice in totalitarian countries but unsuitable conduct in the United States of America.

Don't take my word about community opinion of the *News-Press* under your rule. There's a familiar story about the emperor who wants to know what the people of his kingdom think about him. He goes out in disguise to find the answer. Were you to do this, Mrs. McCaw, you would find that the ordinary folk of our community, the people you find on State Street and in the malls and shops and middle-class homes along the central coast, deplore what you have done to the *News-Press*. People aren't fools. They know a newspaper is supposed to include the scores of both the winning and the losing teams.

Mrs. McCaw, I had the privilege of working for the great Katharine Graham. She became publisher of *The Washington Post* after the untimely death of her husband and in her best-selling memoirs, *A Personal History*, humbly recalls how little she knew about the news business at the time and how hard it was to learn it. She would tell you that you don't automatically become a good publisher just because you own a newspaper. Mrs. Graham believed that the First Amendment imposes a responsibility on newspaper owners to serve the public. She was a wealthy woman who spent millions in her goal to make *The Post* the best newspaper in the world. In the process she defied the powerful, risking the license of a television station she owned to challenge the Nixon administration in the Pentagon Papers case and in Watergate. One of her first acts was to hire a terrific editor, Ben Bradlee. (Ben often quipped that what makes a great editor is a great publisher.) One of Ben's editors, an award-winning reporter and war hero named Dick Harwood, hired me. They would be amused, as would anyone who ever spent time in a newsroom, by

your odd notion that the reporters run the newspapers. Ben ran the paper and Dick the national staff. I worked for them. What was particularly wonderful about working for *The Post* was that reporters knew that Ben and Dick and certainly Kay Graham would back them up when they did good stories that discomfited the powerful or famous.

Mrs. Graham had the exact opposite view than you do about her reporters. She valued them and often came to the newsroom to compliment them. She inspired me, as did my editors. She didn't want you to bow to her views or circle of friends. During the Reagan presidency, when I was senior White House correspondent, Mrs. Graham became close to Nancy Reagan. When I found this out, much later, I asked Mrs. Graham why she hadn't told me. She said she had not wanted to influence my coverage.

You can't be Kay Graham. When they made her, they threw away the mold. But other publishers have also set valuable examples. In the 1950s I was a reporter for the *Merced Sun-Star*, published by Dean Leshner, a controversial figure. When an advertiser came into the paper wanting special treatment on a news story, Dean literally threw him out of his office. It was the talk of the town. Dean served for years on the Merced planning commission. He gave strict instructions that reporters were never to show him any favoritism in their coverage. Dean made a lot of money but also observed journalistic ethics. Later, he promoted me to the editorship of the *Contra Costa Times*.

If you don't like these examples, you might emulate two former publishers of the *News-Press*, Steve Ainsley and Allen Parsons, from the good, old days when *The New York Times* published the paper. You could always get Ainsley or Parsons on the phone. They printed letters that disagreed with the paper. They were active, as you are not, in community affairs. They would have been appalled by an editorial page that ceaselessly attacks the mayor and the city council and the clergy and other community leaders in mean-spirited personal terms. They tried to build up Santa Barbara, not tear it down. They covered the news rather than suppressing it.

Frankly, I question your business judgment as well as your commitment to journalism. Anyone knowledgeable about the news business would tell you that a newspaper property is worth more without a union than with one. Yet you single-handedly have brought the Teamsters to Santa Barbara. Again, it wouldn't take much work on your part to learn that historically I have been critical of the Teamsters. I had nothing to do with getting them here—my

choice would have been the American Newspaper Guild, to which I belonged for twenty-five years. But in a town that is largely unsympathetic to organized labor, you managed to treat employees so shabbily that they voted for the Teamsters by a 33-6 vote! The Teamsters should have you for an organizer. You are right, however, in saying that I now support their efforts. Americans have an established legal right to bargain collectively, and the Teamsters are the only alternative to your authoritarian rule.

My letter is now almost as long as your last diatribe, too long in both cases. So I'll close with a few predictions, all of which we'll be able to check:

Prediction Number One. You will lose in the courts. You will lose your arbitration case with Jerry Roberts. You will lose before the National Labor Relations Board. Yes, you can appeal and cause more hardship for the good people you have unfairly fired, but you will lose. What will you do then? You may again suppress the stories, but they'll be covered, as before, by *The Daily Sound* and the *Independent*. The truth will out.

Prediction Number Two. The Teamsters will prove as tenacious as you are and become the bargaining unit for editorial employees at the *News-Press*.

Prediction Number Three. Your circulation will continue to decline. In time it will be so small that it will be widely recognized that the *News-Press* is nothing more than your vanity press. Unfortunately, this will be of small comfort to the families whose lives you have ruined or to the community, which wants and deserves a good newspaper with high ethical standards.

I wish I could say that I took pleasure in saying these things. I don't. To me it is a tragedy that you care so little for the journalists who did such good work for the *News-Press* or for their families, or for the community in which you live. You ought to take a look in the mirror and reflect on the damage that you have done.

Since you never print my letters and instead put your replies on the Internet, I'll do the same. We'll let the people decide. I trust the people.

Sincerely,

Lou Cannon

