

Opinion

TODAY IN N.C.

Losing a colleague...

My heart isn't in this.

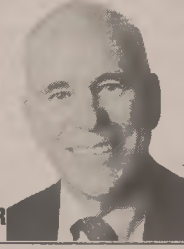
A month ago, I walked away from this column, leaving it in the most capable hands of Mark Binker, a 43-year-old veteran old-school journalist who was as smart and dedicated as they come.

Then Mark died Saturday morning.

A great husband, a great dad, a terrific journalist. Gone. My words are inadequate to comfort his wife, Marla, and Mark's two boys, and they also won't explain to readers what North Carolina journalism has lost. Mark was the ideal reporter for the best job remaining in state political news.

"Please keep Mark's family in your prayers."

-PAUL O'CONNOR



Mark wrote a column for today on last week's legislative crossover deadline. His boss, Clifton Dowell, and I are too stunned to know what is right: Run his last column or have me write one. Ethically, we didn't see how we could run the quotes Mark got from lawmakers without his being here. So, I'm compromising, using some of Mark's info, but not his quotes, and adding my thoughts.

Some background on the deadline: Legislators instituted it about 20 years ago hoping to modernize their operations. Over the previous three decades or so, the state's population and budget had grown enormously and the role of state government had expanded similarly. But the legislature didn't change.

The results were predictable. Nothing got done early in the session, the session dragged, then, when legislators got tired enough to go home, hundreds of bills hit the fan all at once.

So, legislative leaders set earlier deadlines, one to file bills, another for bills to pass their houses of origin and cross over to the other chamber. It spread the stress out better. The deadline came and went last week, and Mark wrote this lead for his final column:

"North Carolina's legislative sausage factory ground more than its typical output last week as lawmakers played their own version of beat the clock."

A paragraph later he wrote, "More than 220 separate measures made it halfway to the governor's desk by passing either the House or Senate during the last week of April. That's a remarkable clip given the legislature only sent eight bills to the governor during the first three months of its session."

Over the years, the deadline evolved to serve another purpose. As Mark noted, it gave legislative leaders an opportunity "to sort the plausible from the preposterous." Legislative leaders can orchestrate the demise of some tenuous bills simply by arranging for their failure to pass, without an up or down vote, by the crossover deadline. That is, bills with some support but maybe not enough to risk the possible ramifications of their becoming law.

Mark noted two such bills: "the biennial effort to allow motorcyclists to zoom around the state without a helmet ... (and) a bill that would let police pull over someone merely driving the speed limit in the left lane of a highway when lead foos might be want to use that space to exceed the speed limit."

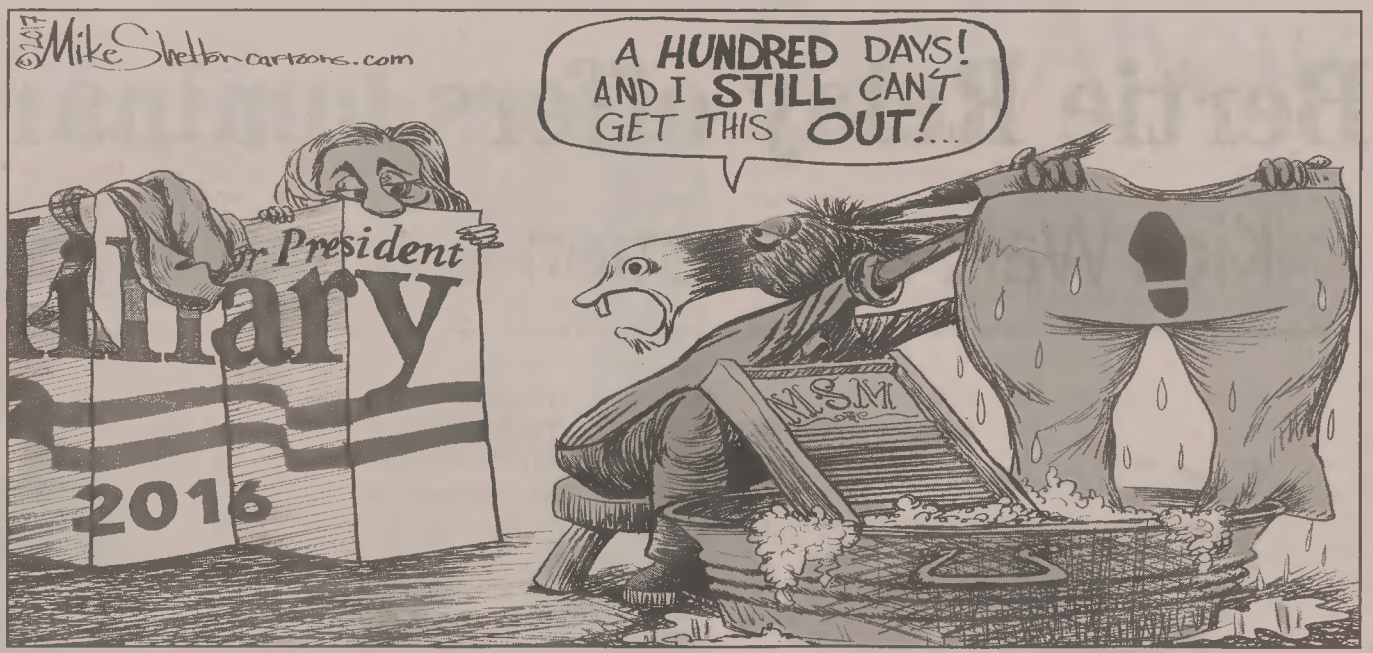
Mark cited "a bill lawmakers hope will make it easier for arenas like the Charlotte Motor Speedway to serve beer and wine at special events." The bill passed the House despite unresolved questions about its impact on state revenues.

Come July, August or whenever this legislature decides to adjourn, there will be another crush of legislation and some bills will be slipped onto the docket. We will wake some morning to learn that bills we knew little about had become law just before adjournment.

Please keep Mark's family in your prayers.

Paul T. O'Connor has covered state government for 39 years.

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832



OUT HERE IN LEFT FIELD

Allegiance is a strange thing...

Allegiance is a strange thing.

Those of us who root for sports teams have all kinds of reasons for doing so – be they heritage or geography or simply a favorite player.

For example I am – and have been all my life – a fan of the Bertie Falcons. That's a little geography and a little heritage.

That's the only one of my loyalties that came easily.

My earliest and longest fidelity is to the Duke Blue Devils. I'd love to tell you there's some great reason for it, but it actually came about simply. My buddy Kirk was a Duke fan and he explained how awesome it was that a college student could get into Duke and still play basketball. He talked about a guy named Mike Ginski and the new Duke coach, a young guy by the name of Mike Krzyzewski.

I began watching and I was quickly hooked – choosing my loyalty for the upstart Blue Devils over the multi-time national champion Tar Heels and Wolfpack.

It wasn't long after I read a book about a guy named Bear Bryant and quickly took a liking to all things Alabama football. I loved the tradition and I loved the nonsense way Bryant did things.

When asked why he left Texas A&M to go to Alabama, Bry-

"How did I become a fan of the Blues?"

-THADD WHITE



ant's answer was simple. "Mama called." I loved the history and was hooked.

Another allegiance that took some time was my love for the Boston Red Sox. That developed out of an early dual love of the Red Sox and Los Angeles Dodgers. As a child, I only knew one thing: I hated the New York Yankees. Their two biggest rivals at the time were the Sox and the Dodgers, so I rooted for both.

As time went on, I was more drawn to the American League and the Red Sox greats, particularly Jim Rice and Carlton Fisk. I was also a big fan of a guy named Butch Hobson.

I've followed the Red Sox ever since, including watching the 1986 World Series that just about killed every Boston fan. Those days seem long behind us now as we have enjoyed some wonderful wins.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers came about almost by happen-

stance. I had long been a fan of the Washington Redskins, but could no longer root for the team when they hired Steve Spurrier.

I decided I was going to root for Tampa Bay because rumors had my favorite coach – Bill Parcells – heading there. When he didn't end up taking the job, I started rooting for them anyway because I liked Jon Gruden and their quarterback – a journeyman named Brad Johnson.

In that time, I've enjoyed a single Super Bowl victory. The Bucs are my most heart-breaking loyalty year-in and year-out.

My newest loyalty is across the pond...the Chelsea Blues in the English Premier League.

How did I become a fan of the Blues? I asked my friend Lewis Hoggard to tell me a team that didn't like his and Randy Whitaker's favorite (Liverpool) nor Todd Lane's favorite (Manchester United). He said Chelsea or Manchester City. I didn't want to root for a Manchester club, so I chose Chelsea.

How did you come about your loyalties? I'd love to hear. *Thadd White is Editor of the Bertie Ledger-Advance, and a devout fan of all the teams above. He can be reached via email at twhite@ncweeklies.com.*

ONE-ON-ONE

Food, fantasy, fiction and politics...

Food, fantasy, fiction, and politics are my favorite topics. If you read my column regularly, you know these preferences and will not be surprised that the books I recommend for reading in May deal with these themes.

First of all, "The Carolina Table: North Carolina Writers on Food" edited by Randall Kenan, collects some of the best writing by North Carolina authors about their favorite foods and eating experiences. Lee Smith, Daniel Wallace, Marianne Gingher, Jill McCorkle, Jaki Shelton Green, Wayne Caldwell, Marcie Cohen Ferris, Michael McFee, and Zeldia Lockhart are some of the contributors.

My favorite is Kenan himself. He opens his essay with a memory of food Duplin County neighbors brought to his family's house when his great uncle died.

"People showing up heavy-laden with food to the homes of the recently deceased. Hams, fried chicken, oven-baked barbecue chicken, pork chops smothered in gravy, dirty rice, Spanish rice, potato salad galore, slaw, sweet potato casseroles, candied yams, hushpuppies, cornbread, soup, chopped pork barbecue, collard greens, pound cake, chocolate cake, coconut cake, pineapple cake, red velvet cake, sweet potato pie, and lemon meringue pie." Jaki Shelton Green writes about a meal she fixed for a man

"Food, Fantasy, fiction, and politics are my favorite topics."

-D.G. MARTIN



she was "kicking to the curb. It seemed best to leave a taste of me on his lips. Fillet of beef in puff pastry and Madeira cream sauce. Caramelized shallots, carrots, and mushrooms. Roasted lemon garlic artichokes. Grand Marnier cheesecake."

The fiction theme is represented by "The Education of Dixie Dupree," the debut novel of Benson's Donna Everhart. The main character, 11-year-old Dixie, is an accomplished liar. The reasons for her lying, her mother's abuse of Dixie, her father's sexual abuse of her mother, and her uncle's sexual abuse of Dixie, explain why she tells lies. Dixie's determined struggle to overcome these challenges anchors her coming of age story.

Hillsborough's John Claude Bemis, a musician and former elementary school teacher, writes for young readers.

He engages them with imaginative magical fantasy. His latest, "Out of Abaton: The Wooden Prince," takes the classic puppet-turning-into-real-boy story of Pi-

nocchio into a wild adventure. Master Geppetto is a brilliant inventor, on the run, being hunted down as a traitor to the emperor. Pinocchio is more than a marionette. He is an "automa," which is a wooden mechanical servant that obeys, without question, the commands of its owner. Like the classical Pinocchio, this automa may be turning into a human.

This book is wonderfully complicated and so very stimulating, even for this adult reader.

Now for the politics. Some North Carolinians still talk about the 1972 election when Jesse Helms won the U.S. Senate seat he was to keep for 30 years and thereby transform North Carolina politics.

Others remember how that election interrupted the upward trajectory of one of North Carolina's most promising and most interesting political figures, Nick Galifianakis.

Semonche's book, "Pick Nick: The Political Odyssey of Nick Galifianakis from Immigrant Son to Congressman" introduces modern North Carolinians to one of our state's most interesting political figures.

These books will be featured during May on UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch.

D.G. Martin hosts "North Carolina Bookwatch."

Bertie Ledger-Advance

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832

THE BERTIE LEDGER-ADVANCE WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1928 THROUGH THE HERITAGE OF THE WINDSOR LEDGER AND THE AULANDER ADVANCE. THE NEWSPAPER TRACES ITS HISTORY TO 1832 WHEN IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED AS THE WINDSOR HERALD AND BERTIE COUNTY REGISTER

Kyle Stephens
Group Publisher
kstephens@ncweeklies.com

Angela Harne
Group Editor
aharne@ncweeklies.com

Thadd White
Editor
twhite@ncweeklies.com

Deborah Griffin
Staff Writer
dgriffin@ncweeklies.com

Leslie Beachboard
Staff Writer
lbeachboard@ncweeklies.com

Jim Green
Sports Editor
jgreen@ncweeklies.com

Michelle Leicester
Creative Services
mleicester@ncweeklies.com

Jessica Mobley
Advertising Manager
jmobley@ncweeklies.com

Lanny Hiday
Copy Editor
bertienews@ncweeklies.com

THE BERTIE LEDGER-ADVANCE (ISSN 051-700) IS PUBLISHED EACH WEDNESDAY FOR \$26.69 (PLUS TAX) PER YEAR (IN BERTIE, HERTFORD, MARTIN, NORTHAMPTON, CHOWAN AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES) BY COOKE COMMUNICATIONS NORTH CAROLINA, LLC, 109 S. KING ST., WINDSOR, NC 27983. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT WINDSOR, NC AND ENTERED AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.

POSTMASTER:
ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE BERTIE LEDGER-ADVANCE, P.O. Box 69, WINDSOR, NC 27983.

CONTACT US:
BERTIE LEDGER-ADVANCE
P.O. Box 69,
WINDSOR, NC 27983.
PHONE: (252) 794-3185
FAX: (252) 794-2835