

Emus Loose in Egnar: Big Stories from Small Towns

Judy Muller

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For years—even decades—pundits and journalists have discussed the imminent death of newspapers, and for good reason. Technology usage, declining subscription numbers, and lackluster ad sales are causing major newspapers to hobble along on skeleton crews. But those who love journalism can take heart, believes Judy Muller: there might be loss on the national scale, but community news is thriving.

An associate professor at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, Muller is the author of *Now This: Radio, Television, and the Real World*. She's an NPR commentator, has worked as a correspondent for ABC, CBS, and PBS, and has several Emmy awards as well as a prestigious Peabody Award.

Her credentials as a national correspondent and educator are important, since she's able to place community journalism in a wider context. Muller's formidable experience in radio and print media allows her a level of expertise that suffuses the book with insight and credibility.

In presenting the argument that journalism isn't dead, and is instead alive and kicking in small town newspapers, Muller redefines the notion of "success." Instead of looking at circulation figures, she focuses on what makes these news sources work and finds that they do best when they include compassionate and courageous storytelling.

She writes, "This book is about a different kind of bottom line, one that lives in the hearts of weekly newspaper editors and reporters who keep churning out news for the corniest of reasons—the belief that our freedoms depend on it."

Muller spent over a year crisscrossing the country to interview editors and reporters at small newspapers, and she notes that these publications provide a mosaic of American life that's deeply appreciated by readers who are interested in preserving the culture of their towns. Although some stories might seem "fluffy," such as the escape of emus that gives the book its title, even those news items bring a community together.

Spiced up with rich portraits of curmudgeons, quirky editors, and pugnacious reporters, Muller's compelling and endearing defense of small town journalism proves the value of thinking globally while writing locally.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (July / August 2011)

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