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Silhouettes

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Leland Hawes sits with perfect posture in one of the cast iron chairs on the Café’ Creole’s sunny patio. He cuts his French fries and spicy fried shrimp with a knife and fork and pops small pieces into his mouth.

"People have accused me of being married to my job," he laughs softly, "I guess you could say they're right."

Pushing the wire frame glasses up on his nose, the shy bachelor recalls the years of working nights and weekends at The Tampa Daily Times and the Tampa Tribune.

"I've always had writing in my blood," Hawes admits.

At the age of 10 he started a weekly newspaper in his home town of Thonotosassa, which he called the Flint Lake Diver. The name "Flint Lake" is a translation of the Indian word which is the town's name.

WEALTHY CITRUS GROWERS

The Hawes family, which owned several small citrus groves under the name of L.M. Hawes Family Partnership, were fairly well off in a time of financial difficulty.

His mother and sister still own the property and live in rural Hillsborough County, though Leland has lived in the Sunset Park area for a quarter century.

LELAND HAWES
…Writing In His Blood.
-Photo from LA GACETA

The Diver was a mimeographed piece and Hawes admits that the old-fashioned stencils were not easy to work with.
"It took me a long time to get those things right," he laughs.

"I had seen political cartoons on the front page of all the dailies and I liked that idea," he continues. He depended on his father for suitable subject matter (most often it was something about Hitler or Mussolini) and he would do the artwork.

GATHERED AT STORE

"I always loved art," Hawes says, "but working on those stencils was a chore."

The community was small in those days, with maybe 600 residents. (It was so small, in fact, that there was no school in town. His mother, like all the other parents in the area, had to drive Leland and his sister twenty miles or more to Gorrie Elementary, Wilson Junior High School and Plant High School.) In the center of town was the fourth class post office in the White Store (so named because it was painted white). This was the gathering spot for everyone in town.

Hawes went there to sell watermelons and collect news on what everyone was doing. He also relied on his cousin Rubie Edwards, the postmaster, to keep her ears and eyes open for bits of news.

Being wartime, there was quite a bit of news about young men going off to serve their country. Hawes also filled the pages with tidbits about the weather and even had some big advertisers.

PRESSES CLOSE DOWN

"My uncle in Tampa, L.W. 'Skew' Lee, would get me ads from places like the Columbia Restaurant ... full page ads from big name places. I think he may have been paying for them himself, though," Hawes confides.

The paper, with 150 subscribers paying five cents a month, changed from a weekly to a biweekly after about a year of publication. Once Hawes began junior high school at Wilson, the presses closed down on the Diver.

At Wilson he was involved in the production of his homeroom paper and at Plant he worked on the staff of the school's student publication.

While he lived in the country, Hawes had very strong ties to the city.

His mother's family lived in Tampa. The Haweses, would leave their home often to visit. His mother would spend her days in town while the children were in school.

CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT

As Hawes was preparing to leave for the University of Florida, Ed Ray, then managing editor of The Tampa Daily Times, who was his Sunday School teacher at First Presbyterian Church of Tampa, offered him the job of campus correspondent for the whopping salary of $30 a month. ("Actually," he admits, "it wasn't bad money for 1947.") That fall marked the first time that women were admitted to the University of Florida. (Previously, UF had been an all male institution and Florida State had been exclusively for women.)

"One of my first stories," Hawes recalls, "was about the coeds hitchhiking along University Avenue." In those days, thumbing a ride was not only much safer
than it is today, it was also the only way to get around for a poor college student who didn’t want to walk.

By attending summer school Hawes was able to complete his degree in three years and return to a job as a police reporter at The Times.

**GANGLAND MURDERS**

"Tampa has always been a good news town for a police beat writer," says Hawes. "In those days we had gangland murders of underworld figures and those kinds of things."

Hawes, always looking for the human interest side of things, says he was helped in his investigations by detectives like Walter Heinrich and Malcolm Beard.

As part of a small staff, he says he gained a lot of valuable experience and worked hard as The Tampa Daily Times was the underdog" paper in Tampa.

But after a couple of years of that type of work, he moved to the Tampa Tribune to cover city hall and the courts.

He went on to report on various subjects. At the time, every reporter had a chance to cover a variety of areas.

In 1956, he won a newswriting award for a dramatic story he wrote about presidential candidates Estes Kefauver and Adlai Stevenson, who met in an unplanned debate under an old oak tree in Ybor City.

Two years later he won an award from the Associated Press for his analytical piece comparing the real estate booms of the 1920s and the 1950s.

In those days, he was greatly impressed by his editor J.A. "Jock" Murray. Murray did investigative stories on statewide controversial issues that few would tackle. His stories laid the groundwork to improve the school system, which was deplorable.

"We could use someone like him today," Hawes says.

In 1960, Hawes added the responsibilities of editor to his repertoire of duties, as chief of the Sunday feature sections.

"I like editing very much," he says.

He went on to edit all the paper’s feature sections and even take a stab at editorial writing from 1963 to 1967.

**HISTORY IS "FUN"**

"I wasn’t ever good at that," he admits. "I just don’t see things in absolutes. There is too much grey … not just black and white."

Hawes went on to various other editorial positions throughout the remainder of the 1960s and the 1970s.

In 1981, he was made night editor, a job he says was interesting, but in November 1982, when management began to kick around the idea of a column about old Tampa, Hawes offered to take on the task.

"It has been a rewarding experience," he says. He says that he has had as much fun with this project as with editing. He enjoys the hours of research at the USF Library and
he especially loves roaming around the state
doing background interviews with people
who experienced the events he is recreating
in his columns.

While he may be "married" to his job,
Hawes has made time for a rather unusual
hobby.

He has an old printing press in his garage,
which he has had for nearly three decades.
The letters must be set by hand, one at a
time.

He keeps a journal and prints copies of it for
fellow members of a club comprised of a
few hundred others across the country who
share his love of old printing machines.

He is active in the Tampa Historical Society
and is on the board of the Hillsborough
County Historical Commission. He is
helping with efforts to create a historical
museum in Tampa (a generic collection,
rather than specialized facilities like the
Ybor City State Museum and H. B. Plant
Museum) and says that while it may be a
long way from reality, it seems to be making
some headway.

Over the years, Hawes has had fun with his
work and sees no reason to ever think about
giving it up.

"I’ve enjoyed being able to find people in
the area who have experienced things in the
past that have been forgotten, but which are
noteworthy and need to be remembered,"
Hawes says.