

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

EDITORIALS



We endorse Don

The Washington Post has decided, after careful reflection and vigorous debate, to endorse **Donald E. Graham**.

We do not come to this decision lightly. This is, after all, the page that endorsed Marion Barry, helping ensure his first election as mayor. We were determined to bring the same thoughtfulness and rigor to this endorsement process as we did in that instance.

Aspects of Mr. Graham's candidacy do give us pause. His sense of sartorial style has led many to suspect as fraudulent his claim to be the son of Katharine Graham. The Christmas sweaters alone would be enough to disqualify most wearers from any position of responsibility. As one knowledgeable source noted, "the hats are particularly appalling."

Then there is the question of Mr. Graham's ill-concealed sympathies for "the cop on the beat" and "the Prince George's County schoolteacher" and his corresponding dereliction of social duty. Despite his status as one of the nation's preeminent business and media leaders, Mr. Graham has consistently balked at attending the Opera Ball, embassy functions, presidential dinners and other events befitting his status. Instead, he has been known boisterously to frequent Wizards and Capitals games (again in outlandish costumes) and to devote most of his free time (not to mention millions of dollars) to assisting young people growing up on the wrong side of the tracks.

These habits have caused some understandable consternation among his own kind.

It is also hard to overlook the fact that Mr. Graham has, year after year, displayed greater expertise on just about every conceivable subject than the most knowledgeable person on his staff on that subject, whether it be District politics, U.S. history, British literature, dendrology or Washington baseball lore. He has, year after year, known his employees' names and life stories better than do their direct managers. He has almost always been right and very rarely wrong. Let's be frank: This can be exceedingly irritating.

That we are prepared to overlook these foibles and annoyances is a testament to the strengths Mr. Graham brings to the table. These are, in brief: brilliance of mind; strength of character; uncommon human decency; unshakeable commitment to bedrock values, and an absolute loyalty to friends and colleague — a loyalty that is returned to an extent unequalled in any other institution that we know of.

As to what we are endorsing Mr. Graham *for*: naturally, our first choice would be for him to be our boss. That not being an option, we endorse him for anything and everything he chooses to do next. We are confident that in those endeavors he will enjoy great, and thoroughly deserved, success.

Staying around newsroom, in brutal fashion

BY DANA MILBANK

Former Washington Post owner Donald E. Graham, in a surprise development, has agreed to stay on with the newspaper as a sartorial consultant.

The announcement of the new role for the legendary CEO dismayed area clothiers but delighted newsroom employees, who had been concerned that the paper's new management might require them to dress in a manner dismissively called "respectable" by those who work at the paper's 15th Street NW office.

Terms of the contract were not disclosed, but people familiar with the arrangement said Graham's consulting responsibilities will include headgear, casual outerwear and hosiery. These people spoke anonymously because they were not authorized to discuss Graham's clothing sense.

Graham, over his long career at the Post, pioneered the fashion movement now known widely as shabby chic. The movement had its origins in the trends favored by Graham's mentor, Warren Buffett, the Omaha billionaire who favors button-down oxfords beneath his no-frills business suits. Graham built on this framework and took rumbled to a whole new level.

"Don proved that you don't need to look like a million bucks even if you have a million bucks," said Paul E. Esther, vice president for men's fashion at Goodwill Industries. "He makes it look effortless, but a great deal of care must be taken to get that slept-in-my-suit look just right."

Job applicants spoke of wearing their finest suits for interviews with Graham, who would put his stocking feet on the desk, revealing to the applicants the holes in his socks. Newsroom personnel had been known to postpone business trips and vacations so they could be in the office when Graham came through in his Christmas sweater. Even on ordinary days, his tattered gray Lands' End sweater and his fedora assured Washington Post employees that Uncle Don was in command and all was right with the world.

Graham's man-of-the-people style spawned legions of imitators in the news business. Today, the unofficial uniform of male reporters — wrinkled khakis and rubber-bottom dress shoes — is an enduring tribute to the publisher.

News that Graham would remain as fashion consultant to The Post sent shares in Hugo Boss AG and the Neiman Marcus Group down 10 percent and 15 percent, respectively, in heavy trading. Shares in Lands' End parent Sears Holding advanced.

Weingarten on Graham: Truth can now be told

BY GENE WEINGARTEN

We all know about Don Graham's famously self-effacing personality — his ritual washings of Post reporters' feet; the time he donated a lobe of his liver to save the life of a copy editor's terminally ill schnauzer; his insistence that his take-home pay never be higher than that of the guy at the Springfield plant who restocks the vending machines, etc.

Similarly, everyone knows about Don's charmingly homely and unpretentious sweaters (though few are aware that, in an act of monastic self-abasement, he knits them from his own nose hairs.) And of course we've all admired the unusual way he atones for hubris every time his newspaper wins a Pulitzer — by eating a live cockroach.

So I think all of us need to forgive Don for what sometimes happens in private, after hours. We need to understand the intense stress that the burden of maintaining an extraordinary public humility brings to a man born into the upper crust of Washington society, expected to behave like an avaricious, conscienceless plutocrat.

So let us not judge Don for his infamous nighttime solitary orgies, writhing on piles of his family's cash, cackling "Mine, all mine!" Or that he sometimes buys yachts and then throws them away after using them once. Or that every year, on his birthday, he hires the New England Patriots to play the Green Bay Packers in his backyard.

None of that makes any difference to us. To us, Don will always be the quiet guy on the edge of the crowd at every newsroom Pulitzer ceremony, smiling shyly, taking no credit, content to bask in the light of reflected glory, because he knows, in his heart, that any time he wanted, with a single phone call and a signature on a check, he could have any one of us murdered....

Forget the message — it was all in the delivery

BY EUGENE ROBINSON

Back in Jurassic times, when Pugwash meant three pampered days at the Ritz-Carlton in the Florida sun, Don Graham's opening remarks were like a State of the Union address. Shivering in the conference room — the thermostat was always set at "Siberia" — we strained to catch not the words but the tone.

Some years, he was dour. "Things look grim," he would say. "Looking ahead, we think newsprint prices might quintuple.

The ink cartel is making noises about an embargo. We have to be very, very cautious."

High-fives (actually low-fives) were exchanged under the table. We knew The Washington Post was having a banner year. The only real problem was struggling to keep track of the money as it poured in.

Other years, though, Don was such a cheerleader he seemed ready to do backflips. He'd tell us what great work we were all doing, how well all our initia-

tives were working out, how important it was to keep moving forward. We'd know immediately that financially we weren't having a great year.

He never let us get carried away in good times or paralyzed in bad times. That steadiness — that refusal to chase short-term illusions — is why The Post has survived the Great Disruption to remain one of the great newspapers of the world. I don't think we fully appreciated it at the time. We do now.

Some say patience and steadiness are

boring. I think history proves they are the hallmarks of a great publisher — in Don Graham's case, one of the greatest newspaper publishers and owners of our time. Those qualities are what led him to his latest, quietly audacious coup: Selling The Post in order to guarantee its future.

Now, if only a much less competent local manager — the owner of the unfortunately named and apparently cursed Washington professional football franchise — would follow his lead...

Unconventional with speed and talent to spare

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

Here's a little-known fact about Don: He types with one finger. Or at least he did back in the glorious days of manual typewriters, when the newsroom was a concert of clatter.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when I started as a Post reporter, there were — aside from Don — two senior reporters who also typed with one finger: Jack Eisen, who covered local transportation and the creation of Metro; and Bernie Nossiter, who was a longtime national economics reporter and later a foreign correspondent based in New Delhi and London.

What Don shared with Jack and Bernie was speed. Fantastic speed. Unbelievable speed. We're not talking here about hunt and peck. We're talking a blur of motion. One finger on the left hand was used to depress the capitalization key, when needed. One finger on the right hand, usually the index finger, did everything else. It pounded a key for a microsecond, then moved on in microseconds to another and another.

The first time I saw Don type, I gawked in disbelief. Everything he did contradicted common sense. Typing with one finger seemed to guarantee missing deadlines, but Don — during his reporting time —

never did. These were days at the Harvard Crimson and at The Post and at Newsweek on the editorial side before switching to business. When writing, Don barely paused. His brain and the typewriter merged into a perpetual motion machine (today, we'd call it a "system"), connected via that overworked index finger.

I have no idea how fast he typed (or, for that matter, Jack and Bernie). Probably 50 to 80 words a minute. It was a lot faster than my touch typing, and I was fast — typing being the one genuine skill I'd picked up in 16 years of formal education. Just whether, or why, St. Albans had been deficient in teaching typing — explaining why Don was re-

duced to one finger — I never learned.

All this is more than nostalgic trivia. It's not just that Don was as fast as the fastest. As a reporter, he was as good as the best. He had a voracious appetite for news, a ceaseless curiosity and a sponge-like mind. He saw connections, causes and consequences more quickly than most. He turned out clean, clear, crisp copy and never let overwrought prose distract from the basic narrative. He had the natural sensibility of a reporter and the talents to go with it.

But for the accident of birth which fated him to run The Post, Don might have been one of the era's great reporters.

The Washington Post

EUGENE MEYER, 1875-1959
PHILIP L. GRAHAM, 1915-1963
KATHARINE GRAHAM, 1917-2001

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