

## Editorial: Gene Brim: Missing at Dorchester

March, 2002

A year ago last winter over lunch Gene Brim talked with us about the upcoming Dorchester Conference. “You know,” he told us, “I’ve been to 32 out of 35 Dorchester conferences.” Wow.

It was especially like Gene Brim to have invested so much energy in Oregon’s annual Dorchester Conference. It was also just like him to be one of the leaders in Pacific University’s Tom McCall Forum. And it was just like him to respond this way when we called him five years ago about a new media publication: “I was on my way out the door when you called, but I stopped and turned around because we really do have a media problem in this state.”

Gene’s comment revealed his thinking: how open he was to new ideas, how important he thought debate was for our society, how he believed that limited public debate had hurt Oregon in previous years, and how he thought that what we did, together, could make a difference.

Besides being a wonderful person, Gene Brim had the unique capacity to take fallen down high-voltage wires (ideas) and pick them and connect them again. In his five years working with BrainstormNW he did it time and time again for us.

Gene, a terrifically successful innovator and business leader in Portland, would often describe himself by saying, “I guess I am an amateur journalist.” For BrainstormNW, he was more than an amateur.

It was Gene’s idea to have Bob Packwood write an article on the history of the Dorchester Conference in ’98. It was also Gene’s idea to feature North Portland minority leader, Chad Debnam (May ’98); Gene’s idea to have a number of writers submit pieces on the condition of Oregon’s GOP in ’98; and Gene’s idea to ask Jack Roberts to participate in a Brainstorm debate series on education in ’00. Along the way, Gene even wrote two articles for BrainstormNW. The most recent, in March ’00, “An Opportunity for Northwest Ambassadors to Give Back,” detailed his experiences with his wife Evie spending a month teaching in Poland.

It was also Gene who—politely—tore up our first business plan calling it “inadequate,” and it was Gene, again, who said, “though it’s not perfect,” to go ahead on the amended plan.

And in the last few months of his life, even while in declining health, it was Gene who stepped up his involvement in BrainstormNW. In late summer Gene found time to become an owner of BrainstormNW, to participate in ownership meetings, and in late December to critique a BrainstormNW TV pilot. He also found time in the fall to advise

the editors on how to get an exclusive interview with Bob Whitsitt. “Make it a piece that lets Whitsitt tell his side of the story, because one more negative story about him won't add anything to the conversation.” And we did.

Gene Brim's involvement in BrainstormNW was an inspiration to the magazine's editors. There were many, many times in the first three years of publication when the struggle of building a new media product in Oregon seemed too difficult, but then the thought would occur: "If Gene Brim believes it's worth trying, then it's worth trying."

Gene Brim's life ended on January 13, 2002, but his inspiration will be a part of BrainstormNW as long as the magazine is published. We'll continue to ask, have we asked enough questions? Have we asked the tough questions? What would Gene think?

Gene Brim—we can't thank you enough, and we will miss you at Dorchester...