

PRINT MEDIA LIVES ON IN PRISON PUBLICATION



I was extremely pleased when Freebird Publishers asked to run this issue of *Mountain Review* in one of their principle publications. But then they asked for some of the magazine's story, and it dawned on me that I knew very little history of the publication I have been so long responsible for.

I addressed some of this last December in an editorial titled "Reviewing the 'M' in Our MRE (Mountain Review Editorial)" (check Freebird's website). The article began "Most people would assume (I assume) that "Mountain Review" is a reference to the scenic hills that surround Morgan County Correctional Complex (MCCX). But those of us who have been here for a while know that this publication (and this prison)



used to be part of the Brushy Mountain Correctional Complex (BMCX)."

Brushy dated back to 1896 and closed in 2009, so the potential for a history was great. When I joined the *Mountain Review* in 2005, the oldest magazines I can remember being on file (and my memory isn't great) only went back to around 1992. In 2007, the previous senior editor stored those rare issues in a garbage bag during a remodel of the school where our office was located. State contractors discarded that 15 years of history in one fail swoop. So I asked one of our oldest prisoners, James (Jim) Slagle, what he could remember of the publication.

Currently one of our most respected legal helpers,



Mr. Slagle is best known for mailing himself out of the Brushy Mountain mailroom, a story he's not too fond of perpetuating – though nonetheless true (sorry, Jim). The package was unfortunately "returned to sender" before getting too far down the road.

A 46-year veteran of the prison system, Jim, now 78, doesn't remember the prison having a paper before 1981. That year Brushy's warden, Otie Jones, allowed Jim to start a publication called *Cabbages and Kings*, a name Slagle says he took from the walrus' dialogue in *Alice in Wonderland*. (If you know Jim, you'd believe



him). Jim Slagle's paper ran for two years before a new warden shut it down, not caring much for Jim's uncensored style. He says at least four more years would go by before the facility produced another publication, around 1987.

MCCX was opened in 1980 and administratively combined with Brushy Mountain in 1997. In October of 2003, the Golden Bears Veterans Association (a prisoner club here at MCCX) donated two computers to the News department, and in April of 2004 the first digital file was created in my archives of the 10.25" x 11.5" newsprint publication the *Mountain Review* had become by that time. (The original *Review*, prior to 2003, was a magazine-size publication with 16-20



pages. Its camera-ready proofs were made by hand with a typewriter, layout paper, Exacto knives and paste.)

An End and a Beginning

The News department has historically been a two-man operation, sponsored by the prison's Education department and has always been a struggle to produce. Dis-



putes and disagreements over access, programming and computer capabilities have plagued the *Review* since the introduction of computers into this almost technology-free environment. During the nine years I've been involved, we've lost two sets of machines, countless files and man-hours of work through interventions by administrative and IT staff. Yet the work goes on.

In 2009, my predecessor left the department for another prison job after getting us tortured for music files on his system (our computers were networked together at the time). A few months later I followed suit to take a state-mandated program. In late 2010, I was asked by the Education administration to return to Education and restart the news program. In the spring of 2011, the *Mountain Review* began a new chapter in prison publishing with the final newsprint issue.

In April of that year, I began experimenting with a newsletter publication called *Mountain Minute*. It was designed to be produced between the larger newsprint editions, which were printed by an outside publisher. I had learned that the prison's new photocopiers were capable of printing on 11" x 17" stock, and I convinced my boss to allow me to buy a few boxes. I produced 7 issues of *Mountain Minute* over the course of 2011. When the 2012 issue of *Mountain Review* went into production, I was in full magazine mode.

The current magazine is produced entirely by hand. I make the production files with CorelDraw, (prior to October of last year, I used word processing programs: WordPerfect, then Microsoft Word, then OpenOffice) export them to a PDF the staff computers can read, then print them with the state's Canon imageRUNNER. The pages are then folded in half, collated and stapled by hand with a modified stapler. This most recent production run was 1,500 copies – 7,500 folds; 3,000 staples. Yes, prison labor is cheap. (Did I mention this is usually a two-man operation, sometimes one?)

In the last few years *Mountain Review* has grown in popularity with the prisoners here and at other institu-

tions, as we have finally standardized production. The quarterly *Review* also, as a whole, focuses more on news items and resources that prisoners can actually use, instead of simply filling the pages with pictures, prose and poetry (although we have that too). As an outgrowth of this focus on resources, I began producing the 156-page *Prisoner Resource Guide* in 2010. The 2014 guide is now available at all MCCX libraries and throughout TDOC facilities.

Mountain Review is a censored publication (mostly by me) and is offered free to the staff, prisoners and visitors to this 2,240-man institution. It is also emailed to the administrative staff of the Tennessee Department of Correction in Nashville. Copies are sent to all other Tennessee prisons and a growing list of contributors to our institutional programs.

If you are interested in becoming a contributor (all contributors are publicized yearly to readers of the *Review*, and most are listed as an "Editor's Choice" in the *Prisoner Resource Guide*), send your prison news-related publication to me at the address below, along with your contact information as you would have it appear in our publications. (The facility is also in need of educational DVDs to broadcast on our closed-circuit television station.)

State policy does not allow me to sell subscriptions to our publications. However, if you would like to receive a free copy of our next *Mountain Review*, or any back issue, send me a self-addressed 9" x 12" envelope with three forever stamps affixed, and I will see that one is sent your way. Please specify which quarterly issue you are interested in receiving.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Mountain Review* and *Inmate Shopper*. These publications are designed to entertain, educate and give you the tools you need to get ahead. Take advantage of them, and good luck!

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