

John L. Smith gives advice to UNLV journalism majors

by Barbara E. Minden

"Don't go to journalism school and think a degree in journalism is going to make you a journalist," advises John L. Smith, general assignment columnist for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "Journalism school is a place to start. It will give you structure.

"Read a lot of books, non-fiction; read constantly. Take a wide range of classes—political science, economics, natural sciences, English literature; study everything you can get your hands on.

"One of the problems with journalism is the ignorance level. You walk in to get a story and you don't know the rules."

Besides cultivating and talking to contacts, Smith said he spends a lot of time reading newspapers and magazines. On a daily basis, he reads the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*,

the *Las Vegas Sun*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and skims *The Wall Street Journal*.

On the credibility of the media, he said, "There's credibility and there's truth. Sometimes they run parallel and sometimes they don't. Credibility is a sincere, hard attempt at being factually correct on a consistent basis; that's what you have to do."

Smith said most reporters think about getting a story that's factually correct under deadline pressure, which is not an easy job.

"When you're on a deadline there is no such thing as a writer's block," he said. "If you don't get your story in, you have to go sell shoes."

Smith said his outlook on journalism has changed somewhat in the last eight years.

"When your idealism gets rapped on the knuckles a few times, you realize that things are not as sunny," Smith said. "Too much idealism is not healthy—it's like having too much sugar."

Part of the reason for the change has been his experience as a columnist who reveals the sometimes unappealing Las Vegas behind the glamorous facade.

He regularly discusses the activities of Nevada politicians that the subjects would rather not see in print. Many of his columns deal with mobsters who weave in and out of Las Vegas gaming, usually hoping to be unnoticed.

When discussing the sometimes difficult job of veri-

fying such information, Smith said, "A lot of mobsters will give interviews for pay—not a good practice. He said that's where working sources are important.

"You have to trust their information," he said. "There aren't many white knights out there."

Even after the column is at the bottom of a birdcage, Smith cannot rest easy.

"There's no place for fear when you write a column," he said. "I have a lot of sleepless nights."

Smith doesn't hesitate to use his clout to right a wrong or give some additional illumination to a subject. When the *Review-Journal* printed a laudatory story on the local publisher of a flyer that advertises the "escort services" in town, it portrayed him as an entrepreneur.

Smith's column soon thereafter published information on some of the pandering charges that had been levied against the man, thereby giving a more accurate picture of the individual.

"The column was edited, but I have a certain amount of political weight and credibility, so it was published," Smith said. "I pointed out that it was in the paper's best interest to print the whole story."

The fact that the paper printed the column showed a willingness for self-examination that is unusual for newspapers, according to Smith, but the publication was not without cost.

"The reporter and I are not friends now and I don't know if I could get such a rebuttal column printed again," he said, "but I'm proud of that story because someone out there who had pulled a fast one didn't get away with it."

Smith received a journalism degree with a minor in English and "got into journalism from a creative writing standpoint."

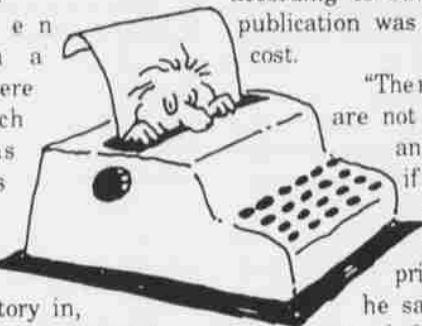
His favorite column stories are human interest stories.

"Some people call and say 'what's the matter with you? You're getting awful sensitive,' but I just tell them I'm a sensitive kinda guy," Smith said.

Smith's personable honesty is probably the characteristic that most contributes to his success as a columnist, but whatever the reason, people want to tell John Smith their stories. Maybe the motive is ulterior; maybe they want to blow the whistle; or maybe they just believe that there are still some "white knights" out there.

"One of the problems with journalism is the ignorance (sic). You walk in to get a story and you don't know the rules"

— John Smith



Faculty Focus—Dr. Robert Dodge

by Gary Puckett

Many students of American Literature at UNLV have had the privilege of being instructed by Dr. Robert Dodge. His classes are a pleasant combination of open discussion mixed with solid instruction. Whenever possible, an emphasis is placed on humor.

On Monday, May 6, those interested can share in some of this humor when Dodge lectures in Wright Hall Room 103 at 7:30 p.m. The lecture is titled "Tales-Tall and Short (A discussion and telling of humorous American stories)." Admission is free.

English majors might be surprised at the early interest Dodge showed in English.

"I was a pre-medical student and found out the classes I really liked were the ones in English and the classes I really didn't like were the ones in biology, so I sort of decided to do what I liked rather than what I didn't like," Dodge said.

In 1963 he received his bachelor's degree from Rice University in Houston and later earned his Ph.D. from the University of Texas in Austin.

When asked what brought him to UNLV, Dodge replied, "I was teaching in Steven's Point Wisconsin, at a medium-sized college, and I started looking around for a job in a warmer climate and for a better job—UNLV offered me both."

He has been at UNLV since 1970.

Although he primarily teaches American literature, Dodge has also taught English 104 and a class in the early English novel. It is a period he is fond of that covers writers from "Richardson to Jane Austin."

"I really like that period," he said. "I think most of them are funny during that period which I guess is why I like it."

To his students, the attraction of humor will come as no surprise.

In his 21st year at this school he has witnessed many changes. The most significant of these probably would be the rapid expansion in the size of the school.

"I like UNLV," Dodge said. "I think it is a fairly good school getting better. Judging from what is going on, it looks like we are going to start stabilizing our growth which probably will mean being somewhat more competitive



Dr. Robert Dodge of the English Department

in the selection of students."

This is a reference to the proposed tightening of entrance requirements, which will put an even greater emphasis on GPA. This is an emphasis with which Dodge, as an undergraduate, did

"They didn't have tuition in those days," Dodge said. "They were one of only two private colleges in the country at that time that didn't." However, the idea of no tuition and no GPA was as appealing then as it would be now; hence, Rice could be very selective.

One fairly new aspect of the English Department at UNLV is the Ph.D. program. This is something for the English Department to be proud of.

"I think we're going to have our first Ph.D. graduating this May, and we're pretty happy with that," Dodge said. "It's exciting for all of us."

However, exciting as a new Ph.D. program may be, humor is exciting for everyone. Those interested in humor in stories should consider attending Monday's lecture series event.

"I'll be telling some stories that I've written and some that I've learned from my research into early American humor," Dodge said. "Most of them, I think, are going to be funny. I think it's going to be an enjoyable evening."

With free admission, it may be an event that shouldn't be missed.

"Rice had such a high opinion of itself that its GPA's were comparable with anybody else's. I mean they were stuck up."

— Dr. Robert Dodge

not need to concern himself.

"When I was an undergraduate at Rice, they didn't have a GPA," he said. "It may be the only college in the country that didn't."

This may sound like a "piece of cake" to some students, but it really didn't work out that way.

"Rice had such a high opinion of itself that it didn't think that its GPAs were comparable with anybody else's," Dodge said. "I mean they were stuck up."

However, the flip side was that it was tough to get into Rice.

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