



THE ADVISOR

LISA CHIU (CWR '93)

As a new adviser to the *Observer*, Case's student newspaper, I wanted to make a dramatic impact on the weekly news operation. It would start with a grand entrance into the newsroom. I'd sweep into the office—me, the hard-boiled retired journalist bringing years of experience to a group of eager, idealistic students—and everyone would freeze.

"Gang," I'd growl, "we're going to make some changes around here." I'd pound my fist on my hefty important-looking desk and then sit back in my expensive executive-looking chair, crossing my feet atop the desk. "You call this a story?" I'd snarl at cowering editors before blowing smoke rings at them. "Get it first," I'd bellow at quivering reporters, "but first, get it right!"

It didn't quite work out like that.

In reality, my role at the *Observer* is less that of a no-nonsense drill sergeant and more that of a hybrid coach/cheerleader. Each Wednesday night, I join the production staff in the basement of Thwing to lend them support as they put the paper together. On those evenings, I stumble into the office with my three-year-old son in tow—me, overcommitted working mom bringing years of experience to a group of eager, idealistic students—and no one blinks.

Students greet me without taking their eyes off their computer screens while I seek an empty place on a worn couch—leftover dorm furniture, most likely—pushing aside jackets, backpacks, and textbooks. I assure my son that I did indeed remember to bring his computer, a Barney toy laptop that plays a variety of maddeningly catchy children's songs. (Once we had forgotten the toy at home, and while my son wept, the staff quietly rejoiced.)

I exchange rushed greetings with two of the section editors before they race off to their MCAT preparation class. I check in with layout and copy editors. I consult with the editor in chief, while serving pizza slices to my son. Finally, for the next few hours, I wander about, offering advice or guidance when called upon.

After getting a close look at how much these students juggle in their daily lives, I've shed the idea of being a hard-charging, demanding newspaper adviser. It's a miracle, I often marvel, the paper gets produced at all. These students jam loads of activities and responsibilities into their lives—but I don't think they'd want it any other way.

Through it all, the students are able to maintain a sense of humor. One of the layout editors, a computer science major from Michigan, designed a computer game last summer that earned him widespread media attention. He was surprised when *Cleveland Magazine* dubbed him one of the year's "Most Interesting People" and threw a lavish party to celebrate him and the other interesting folks. He and the *Observer's* editor in chief attended the event together, returning with a nifty party favor, a photo frame with "Most Interesting People" engraved across the front. One evening, I noticed the frame displayed prominently in the *Observer* office. Above the bank of production computers, my son's preschool portrait beamed at me.

Bringing my son to the newspaper office has added a layer of richness to my advising experience. Sometimes there is tension and conflict in the newsroom, and maybe a little profanity here and there; but overall, he is able to witness a group of people coming together to work toward a common goal. I am reminded of the days when my father, a researcher at Case, would bring me to his office and introduce me to the other scientists in his department. As a seven-year-old inspecting the microscopes, Geiger counters, test tubes and Petri dishes in the lab, I felt important and honored to be able to enter the working world of grown-ups.

I find myself thinking about the students a lot. The obvious successes to celebrate happen when the students win elite scholarship awards and land promising job offers. But as a group, the staff has achieved some quieter goals too. This year, they launched a new online version of the newspaper that resulted in *Observer* content being picked up by Google searches, essentially expanding their readership worldwide.

Few, if any, of the current *Observer* editors plan to pursue careers in journalism as many of them are engineering, science, and business majors. Initially, I was disappointed that there wasn't more interest in professional journalism among the staff, but I have learned to adjust my expectations. I am still learning when to step in and when to back off. I haven't growled at anyone yet. And I haven't shouted, "STOP THE PRESSES!" even once. I'm OK with that, though. Plus, smoke rings are overrated anyway.

Lisa Chiu (CWR '93) works in the Office of Undergraduate Admission. She advises the Observer with Ken Kesegich, who also has yet to blow smoke rings at anyone.