

# WHAT'S ON THE SHELF

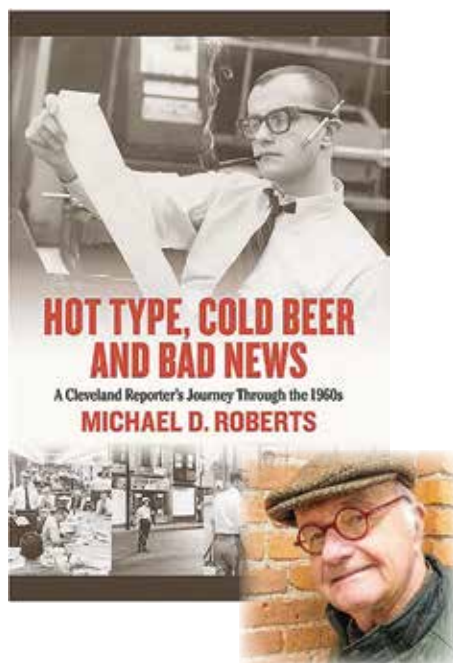
By Helen Marketti

## An interview with the Author Hot Type, Cold Beer and Bad News

Former Cleveland Plain Dealer journalist, Mike Roberts discusses his recent book, *Hot Type, Cold Beer and Bad News* (Gray & Company, Publishers 2018). As a young reporter during the 60s and early 70s, Mike shares many stories of his reporting experiences that include the JFK assassination, Hough Riots, the second trial of Sam Sheppard and the tragic shootings at Kent State. He also spent a little over a year reporting from Vietnam. Mike reported the news at a turbulent time; the 60s were a decade of unrest as the counter culture was making an impact that would change a generation. It was a primitive time for journalism that did not involve cell phones, websites or face book. Instead all a reporter had was a notepad, coins for the payphone and an interest to be the first one to get the story.

As a child, Mike had polio and spent a lot of time indoors resting. While his peers were outside playing Mike started becoming interested in the printed page at the tender age of five. His outlets at the time were the Cleveland Press newspaper as well as LIFE and LOOK magazines. "That was an escape for me," said Mike. "I was still too young to actually read the print but I was always fascinated by the pages. You have to remember there was no television. There was little radio. You might have a short radio program around 5:00 in the afternoon. You were limited then with what was available. I was fascinated by what was going on in print. I had several uncles who were in the military stationed all over the world. They would write my mother letters and she would tell me what they said. I thought it was an exciting time."

Mike was a young rookie reporter when President Kennedy was assassinated. "I was a junior reporter then," recalls Mike. "I had only been at the Plain Dealer for a few weeks. I was fielding all kinds of calls. There wasn't the technology that we have today. People would call in and ask what was going on in the news. It



was such a sad mission to tell them that President Kennedy was dead. It was like telling them a family member had died."

During the 1966 Hough Riots, Mike was in the midst of the intense scene with tempers high and violence common. "I didn't fully understand what was going on at the time. I was a young reporter and didn't really think about safety. I was getting the story. Looking back, it happened in a city that I thought had much wisdom. You didn't expect anything like this to happen. The people were living in squalor. There was lack of proper schools. The tension was high and it was dangerous," said Mike.

*Hot Type, Cold Beer and Bad News* is a page-turner. Anyone interested in Cleveland's history especially during the 60s will want to read this book. For a little over a year, Mike was on assignment in Vietnam. "It wasn't that hard to keep myself detached from what I had seen. I kept an open mind and often reminded myself that I was just a journalist. I talked with many people during my time in Vietnam. I had no doubt in my own mind about the war. It was a failure. It was a great

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disaster of our country. That was my own conclusion but you had to be unbiased to report the story.”

The haunting image showing a member of the Viet Cong being executed by the South Vietnamese Chief of Police in Saigon in 1968 is one that has been seen many times in books, television and documentaries. “I did not see the exact moment,” said Mike. “But I was a short distance down the street when it happened.”

May 4, 1970. Mike raced to Kent State after being informed of what had just taken place. “I was angry as hell the day it happened. It was all such a tragic and incredible mistake. The college students should not have been trying to take on the National Guard who were armed. On the other hand, the National Guard were so undignified that they shot at unarmed students,” he said. “Unfortunately, it was something that was bound to happen. It was the end of the 60s. Now we are in the 70s. There was finally a breaking point with the movement.”

Mike and fellow journalist Joe Eszterhas cowrote a book called, *Thirteen Seconds, Confrontation at Kent State*. (1970). The book is still in print. For the book, Mike interviewed the families of the two female students who were killed. (Sandra Scheuer, Allison Krause) and Joe interviewed the families of the two male

students who were killed. (Jeffrey Miller, William Knox Schroeder)

“I had such a hard time,” remembers Mike. “The families were very kind. It was difficult because they kept asking me “why?”, “why did this happen?” and I didn’t have an answer.”

There are stories that have been burned into our memory or left a lasting impression, which is the job of a journalist. “You have to have an ego if you are going to be a journalist. There are no two ways about it,” said Mike. “You always hated the guy next to you because he wanted to cover the same story. You can have a beer together after work but otherwise it was a competition. I feel I was the luckiest journalist in the world. There were never two days the same.”

Mike did try to work for the Cleveland Press before arriving at the Plain Dealer. “I tried to get a job with the Cleveland Press when I got out of college and they turned me down. They didn’t have room for me. I was disappointed because I wanted to work for a newspaper that was part of my childhood. Then I ended up at their rival, Cleveland Plain Dealer.”

“One of the reasons why I was motivated to write this book is because I wanted to capture a moment in time in our history. It would be lost if I didn’t write about the experiences. Historically, it’s important.”

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