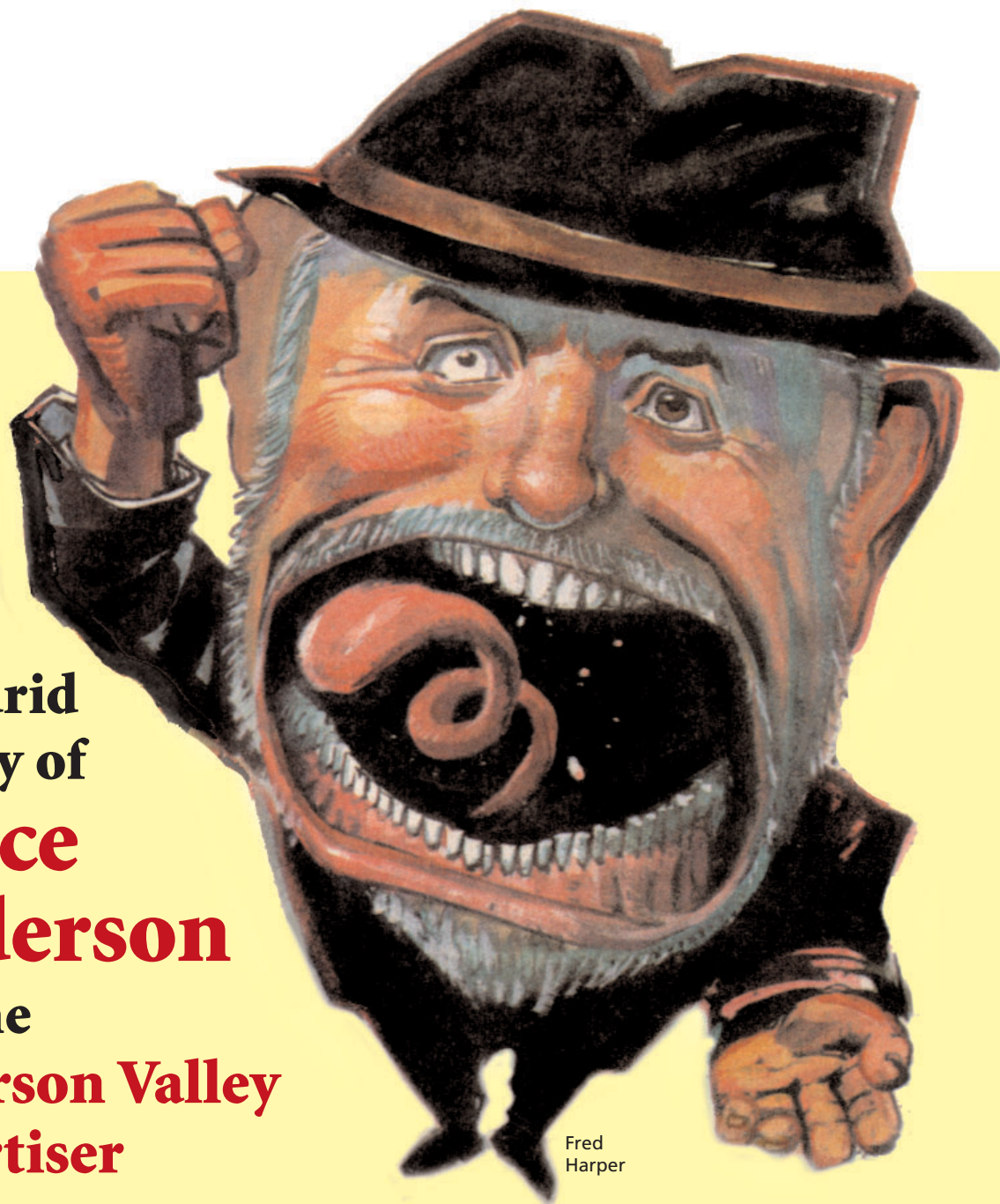


\$1.00

Liar Unlimited

The lurid
history of
**Bruce
Anderson**
and the
**Anderson Valley
Advertiser**



Fred
Harper

By Mike Sweeney

Notice:

*Unlike the Anderson Valley Advertiser,
every word of the following article is true.
You can look it up!*

**Liar Unlimited: The lurid history of Bruce Anderson
and the Anderson Valley Advertiser**

First printing 2004

Available online at www.LairUnlimited.com

Backstage Publishing, P.O. Box 1001, Ukiah CA 95482

Imagine my surprise when I noticed the December 31, 2003 issue of the Anderson Valley Advertiser. Spread across the front page was a giant headline, “I was a Communist for the FBI,” followed with, “By Mike Sweeney as told to Bruce Anderson.”

Since I hadn’t spoken to Bruce Anderson for five years it was apparent that he was attempting yet another shameless hoax. The phony first-person article went on and on for thousands of words, presenting an intricate first-person fantasy that had me “confessing” to about a dozen felonies. Nowhere in the paper was there a hint that the article was contrived by Bruce Anderson himself without the slightest input from me or the slightest connection to reality.

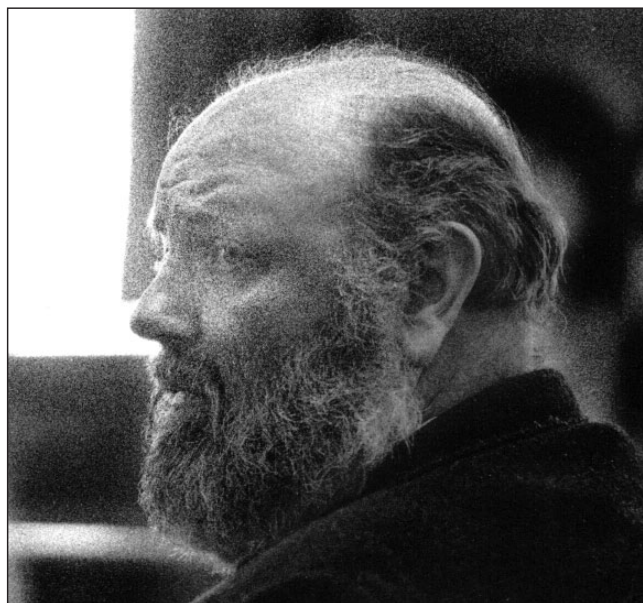
Apparently, the impact of this brazen hoax article failed to meet Anderson’s hopes. So he produced another one the following week, under banner headline, “I bombed Judi Bari,” again with the attribution, “By Mike Sweeney as told to Bruce Anderson.” And again not a hint that the article and its lurid details were made up out of thin air.

Still unsatisfied, Anderson struck again the following week with “Judi Bari Tells All,” prefaced with an “Editor’s Note” claiming Judi Bari, through her executor Darlene Comingore, left him the following letter with a “strict instruction that it not be made public until five years after her death.” Naturally, Judi did no such thing, and neither did Judi ever say, believe or do what was attributed to her in the fabricated article that followed.

The reaction to this triple-headed hoax was predictable. The legitimate media studiously ignored him, as did long-time residents of Mendocino County who knew Bruce Anderson’s habits. Some of his gullible readers, however, actually took the articles at face value, and became quite excited until more sober folks illuminated for them Bruce Anderson’s bizarre 20-year history of hoax, lies and insults.

Bruce Anderson's weekly inventions are the main feature of his Anderson Valley Advertiser, which is a kind of small-time National Enquirer without the photos. The Anderson Valley Advertiser was an innocent country weekly until 1984, when Anderson bought it and turned it into an opinion journal. He explained: "I've always viewed the newspaper as a political weapon." (Los Angeles Times 2/14/96).

Almost immediately, Anderson provoked an advertiser boycott in the small town of Boonville, the hub of rural Anderson Valley in Mendocino County. Outraged local residents made an effort to start a competing Anderson Valley newspaper designed to take away his local readership. The Anderson Valley Advertiser (AVA) survived by cultivating subscriptions throughout Northern California and beyond from people who liked off-beat political attacks, clever insults, and outrageous gossip.



"Unfortunately, I have the face I deserve."
—Bruce Anderson, 1996

For decades, Anderson has shown he will deliberately lie in order to sell papers, settle scores, or just abuse people for his own pleasure. And when the printed word has proven to be an inadequate weapon, he has resorted to threats of violence and actual physical assault.

The key to the AVA's survival has been to attract attention—any attention, by any means necessary, including just making things up.

The first big hoax hit on February 3, 1988, when Anderson published a long front-page interview with local Congressman Doug Bosco. To give the "interview" more credibility, it was represented as a transcription of a

tape recorded session with David Yepson, a prominent reporter with the Des Moines Register.

The phony interview quoted Congressman Bosco as insulting his own constituents who opposed offshore oil drilling. They were “mostly a bunch of easily stirred-up know-nothing malcontents who couldn’t care less about anything other than their beautiful ocean and where their next joint is coming from,” Bosco was quoted. The interview contained numerous other insults and comments that, if genuine, would have caused the abrupt termination of Bosco’s political career.

There was nothing at all in the AVA to indicate the interview was fake and hundreds of angry calls flooded the Congressman’s office. When Bosco denounced it as a hoax, Anderson, loving the attention, insisted it was genuine. “I’m declaring that it’s for real,” Anderson told the Santa Rosa Press Democrat (2/6/88).

Because Anderson insisted the interview was genuine, the hoax got national attention. Six days after the fake interview was published, Anderson was still telling inquiring reporters that he had just received transcripts of the “interview” from Iowa. The next day, however, he finally admitted, “Yes, I did it. I confess.” (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 2/10/88)

Anderson was completely unapologetic. “The feisty owner of the tiny Anderson Valley Advertiser offered no apologies,” said the Santa Rosa Press Democrat. “And he showed no remorse for the notoriety brought fellow journalist David Yepson. The Des Moines Register political reporter, purported author of the Bosco interview, spent the week leading up to Iowa’s caucuses fielding calls about Anderson’s hoax. ‘F— him if he can’t take a joke,’ said Anderson.” (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 2/10/88)

Recently Anderson told Los Angeles Times reporter Rone Tempest that he DID apologize for the Bosco hoax (LA Times, 2/28/03). In Anderson’s world, it’s never too late to add another lie. For example, he has been quoted as claiming he has never been found guilty of libel, ignoring Anna Taylor’s 1995 verdict against him.

The Bosco hoax was a revelation to Anderson. By brazen fraud, he had succeeded in winning national notoriety for his tiny weekly publication. Seven years later, Anderson would recall the Bosco

***Anderson would
recall the Bosco
hoax as his
“proudest moment.”***

hoax as his “proudest moment.” (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 4/25/95)

Although Anderson has never succeeded in matching the impact of the Bosco scam, it isn’t for lack of trying. His history is filled with smaller-scale deceptions. He printed a phony press release announcing that the Mendocino County Office of Education was conducting seminars on how to masturbate more effectively. (San Jose Mercury News, 8/16/87) He regularly wrote absurd, humiliating articles and put the bylines of prominent local people on them, such as “To My Penis on Our 60th,” under the byline of Bruce Hering (5/3/95).

Anderson found that dishonesty was no impediment to the AVA, as long as he made it sufficiently entertaining. As the Wall Street Journal noted in an early, amused profile, “Indeed, Mr. Anderson sometimes simply makes things up, arguing that fiction occasionally gets at essential truth better than fact.” (8/20/85)

But what about libel? It amazes readers that Anderson has survived for 20 years without being cleaned out by a court judgment for libel. Bosco, for example, told the media he was seriously considering a suit, but didn’t pursue it.

***“I can say anything
I want, because
there’s nothing for
them to take.”***

—Bruce Anderson

There’s no point in suing for libel unless you can collect money damages, at least enough to cover the huge legal fees required to bring a serious civil suit. Anderson is defiantly poor. As he bragged early on, “I can say anything I want, because there’s nothing for them to take.” (San Jose Mercury News, 8/16/87)

One of his targets over the years, former Ukiah attorney Jared Carter, explained why neither he nor any of his clients had ever sued the AVA for libel: “He would just use it for publicity and if you won, you’d wind up with nothing.” (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 4/25/95)

While it’s likely that Anderson and his thrifty wife Ling have hidden away money somewhere, they still publish the AVA out of the home they have owned in Boonville since 1973. And they have taken out mortgages on the property six

times since 1983. Sometimes they had three mortgages stacked up at the same time. And California's homestead law allows Anderson to protect the first \$125,000 of equity in his home from any court judgment now that he has reached the ripe old age of 65.

Dumb luck has given Anderson access to a deep pocket that gives him further security against litigation. His nephew, Robert Mailer Anderson, married Nicola Miner, daughter of the co-founder of Oracle Corporation, Robert Miner, who died in 1994. The extent of Nicola Miner's inheritance isn't publicly known, but by comparison, the other co-founder of Oracle, Larry Ellison, has been named by Forbes Magazine as America's second-richest individual, with a fortune around \$27 *billion*.

Robert Mailer Anderson and wife Nicola live the high society life in San Francisco, building a 13,200 square foot mansion in Pacific Heights, contributing generously to charities, and sitting on the boards of the opera and ballet. Robert published the critically-praised first novel *Boonville*, with thanks to his uncle Bruce Anderson printed on both the book jacket and the acknowledgements. In 2000, the couple paid \$3.2 million to purchase a huge ranch outside Boonville. An informed source states that Bruce's wife Ling manages the ranch.

The fabulously-rich couple maintains very close ties to Bruce Anderson's children. Zack Anderson, Bruce's son, is the co-author with Robert Mailer Anderson of a screenplay based on Robert's book. (San Francisco Chronicle 1/28/04) The couple owns several residential properties in San Francisco that are occupied by Anderson relatives.

In 2001, Bruce Anderson retired his other outstanding mortgages and took out a new loan of \$125,000 from Robert Mailer Anderson and Nicola Miner, according to Mendocino County records.

About the same time his nephew bought his first mansion, Anderson removed a slogan which had graced his front page for more than 10 years: "*Peace to the cottages! War on the Palaces!*" Perhaps he thought Robert would take it personally.

Bruce Anderson's connection to his rich nephew means anyone who contemplates a lawsuit against the AVA can expect that Anderson will have unlimited resources for legal defense and appeals. Yet at the same time Anderson can trust his

***Anderson's nephew
married into a
huge fortune.***

relatives to hide all his own assets from possible seizure following a libel judgment.

Despite the obstacles, two angry targets went ahead and sued Anderson anyway. Anna Taylor of Navarro represented herself in a small claims court actions in 1995 after Anderson claimed she had defrauded a public housing assistance program. She won the maximum small claims court judgment of \$5,000, but was unable to collect any money due to a legal technicality—she had failed to make a written demand for correction within 20 days. (Ukiah Daily Journal, 8/2/95, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 12/19/95)

Anderson was sued again for libel in 1999 by former Anderson Valley public radio station manager Phil Tymon after Anderson printed a long series of lies about him. The AVA claimed Tymon disrupted his own station while drunk; was forced to resign as a result; organized a group to move the station to another town; and got his job in the first place only because his mother owned the building (all untrue). Thrown in were the usual gratuitous insults—calling Tymon a “bubble butt,” “chubby,” “whiny,” and so on. For the AVA, this was actually only mild treatment. But Tymon had a law degree and taught a class in media law. So he sued Anderson for \$3.75 million.

Tymon’s case was particularly strong because he had already won a small claims court judgment against another tiny outlaw publication that had published some of the same falsehoods.

The outcome of Tymon’s lawsuit is revealing about how the legal system allows someone like Anderson to stay in business. Despite his alleged poverty, Anderson retained a first-class local litigator, Rod Jones. Tymon, who had never practiced law, tried to represent himself because of lack of funds, but later hired an attorney. This attorney failed to provide an adequate response to a clever legal counterattack by Rod Jones, who filed a motion for dismissal based on California’s “SLAPP Suit” Act, which is a law intended to protect the free speech of public advocacy groups from harassment lawsuits by big corporations. The SLAPP Suit law puts the burden on the plaintiff to convince the judge that he is likely to prove his case at trial. Looking at Tymon’s incomplete filings, the judge ruled that he hadn’t presented enough evidence, dismissed the lawsuit, and assessed Tymon for all of Anderson’s legal fees! (Mendocino County Superior Court, No. 80536) Tymon lacked funds to appeal this incredible ruling. He is still being pursued for Anderson’s legal fees.

Denied any practical legal recourse, many aggrieved local residents have taken a

small measure of justice into their own hands. According to one newspaper account, “Through the years, Anderson has been the target of about 20 death threats and numerous unsolved acts of vandalism. One prankster left a large pile of manure outside his home, while another ransacked his office, damaging computers and other equipment. A third vandal sabotaged the engines of his pickup and the minivan he used to deliver papers.” (Los Angeles Times, 2/14/96). Anderson told another reporter that one of his windows had recently been shot out. (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 4/25/95)

When lies aren’t enough, Anderson uses violence or threats. On April 25, 1988, his incessant attacks on the County School Superintendent Jim Spence finally provoked Spence to refer to him as a “third-rate McCarthyite” at a school board meeting. Anderson took off his coat, walked up to Spence, and assaulted him.

Witnesses testified that Anderson, who is 6 foot 4 inches tall, grabbed the much smaller Spence by the neck and punched him twice, sending him sprawling over the refreshment table. (Ukiah Daily Journal, 4/26/88) At his trial, Anderson swore under oath he was acting in self-defense. (Years later, he would admit this was a lie. “That was a criminal offense and I deserved to be in jail,” he told the San Francisco Examiner (6/5/96)).

Anderson took off his coat, walked up to Spence, and assaulted him.

Anderson was convicted for disturbing the peace and offered probation if he apologized and stayed away from school board meetings for one year. He refused these conditions and was sentenced to 60 days in jail. Anderson proclaimed himself a political martyr, staged a noisy support rally at the courthouse steps, and announced he would refuse to go to jail. (Ukiah Daily Journal, 9/14/88) But he showed up for jail as scheduled.

Even the legendary tolerance of rural Mendocino County was exhausted by Anderson’s violence. There were repercussions. The Ukiah Daily Journal refused to print the AVA on its press any longer and the County Social Services Department began to take a very close look at complaints they had been receiving

about Anderson's conduct as operator of his group home in Boonville.

Since the 1970's, Anderson's primary means of support had been running a state-funded home for troubled teenage boys, some of them retarded. Following the Spence incident, Anderson decided to give up his state group home license and instead applied for a foster home license from the County Social Services department. But the department determined that Anderson was unfit. Anderson appealed, claiming as usual political retaliation, and an extensive investigation of Anderson ensued.

Besides the assault on Spence, the most sensational allegations against Anderson were made by a former AVA contributor, author Mike Koepf. Like many of Anderson's cronies and contributors, Koepf had become a bitter enemy. Koepf produced two former teenage residents of Anderson's group home, Frank Pitts and John Long, who testified under oath that Anderson had punched them in separate incidents, giving Pitts a black eye. (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 2/1/90) A Social Service investigator reported that Koepf told him: "Anderson should never be allowed to take care of young men again. This response was based on Koepf's opinion that Anderson has continually psychologically abused the young men who have lived at the group home." (Memorandum, Billy Moore to Dennis Denny, Mendocino County Social Services, 10/4/89).

Koepf also accused Anderson of stealing Pitts' Social Security checks. And Koepf testified that Anderson had put Koepf's name down on state documents as vice-president of his group home corporation, without Koepf's knowledge or consent. (Ukiah Daily Journal, 2/2/90)

Other insights into Anderson's character came out at the hearing. In a 22-month period, Anderson received 12 traffic tickets, providing a graphic portrait of the embattled editor speeding around narrow country roads, barreling through stop signs.

The administrative law judge of the hearing upheld the denial of the foster home license, finding that Pitts' and Long's claims were unproven, but concluding that Anderson's record of violence made him unfit to operate a foster home. The assault on Spence was key. The ruling noted that "Respondent Bruce Anderson does not admit any wrongdoing on his part and has not demonstrated that he would not act in the same manner in the future." (Administrative Law Judge Ruth Astle, Case No. 238909501, 2/28/90)

Violence is a constant theme in Anderson's rhetoric. His own brother, Rob Anderson, has been a target of his threats. Rob was once Bruce's closest collaborator, taking over editorship of the AVA in 1996 when Bruce was jailed for contempt of court. Later, he joined the long list of former AVA contributors who couldn't stomach Bruce Anderson's dishonesty any longer. In a publicly-circulated e-mail exchange in 2000, Rob told Bruce:

"Only someone who knows the people and events you describe in your latest front-page AVA attempt to destroy [former AVA cartoonist] Mary [Miles] understands what a liar and cowardly prick you are....all bullies are essentially chickenshit and prefer to attack people who can't defend themselves."

Bruce Anderson's reply was, "Next time I see you I'm going to kick your gutless ass."

One of the things that makes Bruce Anderson different from normal people is his apparent indifference to what anyone thinks about him. This blind spot has led him to repeated failures in his quest for power and attention. Anderson ran for public office 9 times between 1983 and 1994. Getting elected to something in rural Mendocino County isn't that difficult. Nevertheless, he failed again and again in his races for local school board, county school board, county supervisor, and state assembly. In his last race he polled 8 percent. Somehow, he just couldn't grasp the fact that most voters considered him a thug. Amusing at times, but a thug all the same.

For years, Anderson displayed the slogan, "Newspapers should have no friends" on his masthead, and has put this principle into practice throughout his troubled life. Attracted at first by the outlaw radicalism of the AVA, collaborators usually sour on Bruce Anderson when they get to know him better. Anderson then turns on these former associates with special ferocity. Besides his own brother Rob, the list includes Judi Bari, David Colfax, Anna Taylor, Mike Koepf, Mary Miles and former lead contributor Mark Heimann.

Mark Heimann was the AVA's chief contributor from 1994 to 1999, earning a princely \$100 per week salary from Anderson. He was as aggressive and hard-hit-

***"What a liar
and cowardly
prick you are."***

*—Rob Anderson to
his brother Bruce*

ting as Anderson, but liked to be truthful. That's what led to their blowup.

As Heimann testified under oath in Mendocino County court, he submitted a story to Anderson in 1998 about radio station manager Phil Tymon. Then, without Heimann's knowledge, Anderson inserted into the story false and libelous statements

about Tymon which were the cause of Tymon's \$3.75 million libel suit against the AVA. Since Heimann's byline was on the story, Tymon sued Heimann too.

***“Come down here
you chickenshit and
I’ll kick your ass,”***

*Heimann yelled from
outside Anderson’s house.*

Heimann was furious at Anderson's deceit. When Tymon offered to drop the suit if the AVA would run a front-page retraction and publish a letter by Tymon, Heimann wanted to agree. But Anderson refused, and their argument escalated until Heimann was challenging Anderson to fight. “Come down here you chickenshit and I’ll kick your ass,” Heimann yelled from outside

Anderson's house. Like a typical bully, Anderson quailed in the face of righteous anger. Rather than accept Heimann's challenge to fight, Anderson instead called a lawyer, swore he was afraid of Heimann, and got a restraining order prohibiting Heimann from going near Anderson's home and office. (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 8/15/99)

In court, Heimann submitted a copy of a letter from him to Anderson dated June 29, 1999, which has some blunt revelations about his former editor. “You are the true author of the untrue statements made about Mr. Tymon,” Heimann wrote. “You also inferred at that Sunday meeting (May 30, 1999) that you would not be adverse to me committing perjury in order to defeat Tymon's claims....I have observed you repeatedly display an unreasonable hatred and malice toward Mr. Tymon (and a host of others), and make statements for which you had no basis to believe true.” (Exhibit, Civil Action #99-1355).

Heimann claimed Anderson had essentially fired him because he wouldn't lie. He sued in small claims court for \$2,125 in back wages, but lost. Then he left town.

Anderson's arrogance landed him in jail again in 1996. It also exposed him yet again for making loud public promises he wouldn't keep.

The controversy arose from the arrest of Eugene “Bear” Lincoln of Covelo for a

shootout with sheriff's deputies in 1995. Sheriff's deputy Bob Davis and a friend of Lincoln's, Leonard Peters, were killed. After a long manhunt, Lincoln surrendered and was charged with murder.

While he was in jail, Lincoln smuggled out a letter which was published in the AVA. The prosecutor immediately subpoenaed Anderson for a copy of the letter and the envelope it came in, so he could verify Lincoln had actually written it. It was potentially crucial evidence, said the prosecutor, because it placed Lincoln at the scene of the shootout and gave his version of the events, and would help confirm or deny his claim of self-defense.

Since the letter had been published, it wasn't protected under the "press shield law" that applies to journalists' sources. The prosecutor had the absolute right to obtain the evidence.

Once again, Anderson jumped at the chance to play the heroic rebel. "I'm not going to give them the letter, and I'll go to jail if I have to over it," he proclaimed. (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 3/7/96).

In court, he told the judge he would "never" turn over the letter, and bombastically told him, "since you're going to inconvenience me for a year, I hope you'll allow me the convenience of going to jail today." (Albion Monitor, 5/27/96)

Sure enough, the judge ordered Anderson jailed for contempt of court. Rather than holding out for a year, Anderson lasted only for the weekend before succumbing to lack of coffee. He telephoned his brother Rob and instructed him to



RUFF TUFF CREME PUFF

Judi Bari's cartoon about Bruce Anderson's instant retreat from his vow to hold out in jail for year rather than surrender the Bear Lincoln letter (1996).

***Anderson swore
he would hold out
for a year, but
only lasted a
weekend.***

hand over the letter. This prompted hilarity among local observers, with Judi Bari circulating a cartoon of him over the caption, “Ruff Tuff Crème Puff.” “I guess I was having caffeine withdrawal,” Anderson later explained.

But his surrender was rejected by the judge. The AVA produced only a typewritten copy of the letter, without a signature, claiming it was the only version the newspaper had ever received. The judge demanded the original and sent Anderson back to jail.

“Anderson, handcuffed and wearing orange jail garb, was visibly shaken Wednesday afternoon by the prospect of returning to an isolation cell at the Mendocino County Jail...” reported the Santa Rosa Press Democrat (5/30/96). Despite his craven retreat from his bombastic vow, Anderson ended up a martyr after all, and reaped what the Santa Rosa Press Democrat called a “frenzy” of media attention.

Eight days later, Anderson was finally released, after his wife and typesetter both took the witness stand and swore that the typewritten version was, indeed, the only copy the AVA had ever received.

Ultimately, Lincoln was acquitted after lawyer Tony Serra convinced the jury that the nighttime shooting was self-defense.

Of all his hatreds, none has consumed Bruce Anderson more than his 13-year feud with Judi Bari. Judi was an indomitable spirit who would never back down to a bully. So it’s no surprise Anderson stepped up his attacks AFTER her death, when she could no longer answer him.

Judi Bari, my wife from 1981 to 1988, was an incandescent Earth First! leader who created the Redwood Summer protests of 1990. Just as Redwood Summer drew near, she was seriously injured in a car bomb attack in Oakland, California, on May 24, 1990. The bomber has never been identified but Bari was convinced she was targeted by the timber industry. The bombing brought her national attention, especially after the FBI arrested her and falsely accused her of carrying the bomb herself. The charges were dropped for lack of evidence. Bari and her passenger in the car, Darryl Cherney, sued for civil rights violations. Ultimately, this lawsuit led to a precedent-setting \$4.4 million verdict in federal court in 2002.

Many local observers marveled at the intensity and irrationality of Anderson's attacks on Bari, speculating that it was reminiscent of a spurned lover. But the likely explanation is much simpler. Judi Bari was just another Mendocino County activist when Anderson met her in 1988. The car bomb attack propelled her to national prominence. She used this fame expertly, becoming a powerful voice for Earth First! militancy, yet she was also a persuasive advocate for strict nonviolence as the only viable tactic for the environmental movement.

DR. DOO



One of the sexist AVA cartoons which provoked Judi Bari's prank, igniting the feud with Bruce Anderson. (AVA, 2/3/93)

Anderson was simply jealous that Bari had achieved the political power and fame he craved himself. While Anderson was widely hated and couldn't keep the friendship of even his own staff, Bari inspired enduring loyalty and genuine affection even from adversaries.

So when Bari dared to intercept the AVA on the way to the printer in 1993 to censor a sexist cartoon, Anderson's jealousy exploded into a rage that continues to this day.

Anderson, an unabashed misogynist, had been running cartoon strips by Fred Sternkopf featuring naked women with enormous breasts. It was strange content for a newspaper that pretended to have radical progressive politics. Among Sternkopf's caricatures were some female Earth First! activists, including Judi Bari herself. Her protests to Anderson against this sexism were unavailing.

So Bari and four female friends intercepted the AVA's paste-ups on the way to

***Anderson's jealousy
exploded into a
rage that continues
to this day.***

the printer on February 10, 1993. They replaced Sternkopf's strip with their own expertly-drawn parody. It was intended as a prank that would give Anderson a taste of his own medicine.

When Anderson found out, he wasn't amused. He stopped the presses, ripped out Bari's cartoon, and filed a criminal complaint with the Willits police demanding Bari's arrest for felony theft, conspiracy and violation of his civil rights. (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 2/13/93)

The charges weren't pursued, but Anderson's feud with Bari exploded. He published a Sternkopf cartoon depicting Bari as a Nazi, complete with swastika armband. (AVA, 3/3/93) No matter that Bari had a Jewish mother.

Anderson thought Bari was endangering his readership among the North Coast's large community of political radicals:

"Judi Bari called around to drum up support for a girlcott of the AVA until I agreed to drop the Dr. Doo drawing....I especially appreciated this particular treachery occurring while I wasn't around to defend myself." (AVA, 8/14/93)



Anderson's depiction of Judi Bari as Nazi (AVA, 3/3/93)

"Several times she's gone way out of her way to attempt to harm the paper on the mistaken assumption she and her small group of idolators are a key part of AVA's circulation. Why? Bari and KPFA types don't like irreverence and they hate even the hint of criticism of them." (AVA, 3/30/94)

Soon Anderson was pounding away with a steady drumbeat of slurs on Bari's personality and politics, none with any connection to the facts:

"... her regal personality and often cruel personal behavior wrecks any political group she's involved in." (AVA, 5/24/95)

"I think now the woman is a complete

fraud, a 'feminist' who treats other women worse, much worse, than dogs, a leader of Earth First! whose slogan is 'No compromise in defense of mother earth' but who worked out a deal with L-P to squelch enviro protest at Albion because it was in her immediate legal interests to do so, and a woman who has salted away thousands of dollars from donors whom she seldom has had the ordinary courtesy to thank." (AVA, 4/26/95)

"Judi Bari herself is a very violent person, physically and psychically [sic], as any of her critics can testify." (AVA, 9/13/95)

"The lady's a lie factory." (AVA, 12/6/95)

"Bari is a brave person in lots of ways but she's terminally dishonest intellectually, slandering her critics as FBI agents or sexists or liberals or whatever if they aren't abject at her feet." (AVA, 1/24/96)

"I know her well enough to know that she is not a truthful person and I don't believe anything she says unless I get independent corroboration of it." (AVA, 2/14/96)

Anderson even mocked her for referring to her injuries from the bombing: "Judi Bari has used the bombing as a club to shut up her critics, and there's a lot to criticize. But anybody who dares direct an implicitly critical question her way is met with something like: 'How can you talk to me like this when I was nearly killed by the FBI and I'm in physical pain all day every day?' Well, gee, Joan of Arc never so much as groaned until the flames licked her chin. Do you ever hear any sniveling from Bernadette Devlin whose entire family was shot up by Protestant fanatics?...JB has also used the bombing as a sort of political equivalent of a breast implant, becoming a semi-famous person who survived an attack for her political activity which, since the bombing, has been zilch." (AVA, 11/16/94)

Beyond baseless personal insults, Anderson falsely accused Bari of massive sell-outs to the timber companies Louisiana-Pacific and Pacific Lumber. After L-P sued Bari and other activists for huge damages, Bari negotiated a settlement that amounted to a total surrender by L-P. But Anderson repeatedly claimed that it was a sell-out, totally misrepresenting the facts:

"I wonder if Judi Bari will condescend to explain her blithe capitulation to

***He even mocked Bari
for mentioning her
injuries from the
bombing.***

Louisiana-Pacific....Bari might consider amending the old “no compromise” slogan to “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth Unless the Self-Appointed Leadership Gets Bored With It and Decides to Move On to Bigger And More Interesting Photo Ops.” (AVA, 3/2/94)

“Bari privately negotiated an agreement with Cindee Mayfield, L-P’s attorney, which keeps protests off more than 15,000 L-P acres!” (AVA, 11/16/94)

Anderson also began a campaign to undermine public support for Judi Bari’s and Darryl Cherney’s lawsuit against the FBI and City of Oakland for civil rights violations against them after the car bombing. Anderson’s smear campaign would continue with increasing virulence up to the actual trial in 2002. In the early stages, Anderson asserted the baseless speculation that Bari would sell out:

“In fact, it’s more likely that the FBI will settle out of court on condition none of this stuff is ever revealed while B&C become millionaires, convictions being no match for cash.” (AVA 3/8/95)

“Prediction: Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney will soon settle their case with the FBI for big money...The conditions of the payoff will be a sealing of the record and an agreement between Bari-Cherney and the FBI that B-C not reveal either the terms of the deal or discuss the particulars of the case in public.” (AVA, 12/6/95)

***Attempt to
undermine
support for Bari’s
federal lawsuit.***

Bari, of course, fought back against this hate campaign. When Anderson announced in 1995 that he was disgusted with Mendocino County and was selling his newspaper and moving away (he later changed his mind), Bari made this comment: “I think he has fouled his own nest, and that’s why he’s leaving.” (Santa Rosa Press-Democrat, 4/25/95)

Anderson gave a revealing explanation of why he wanted to sell out: “When you get to where about half the people you see in Mendocino County inspire intense homicidal fantasies, it’s clearly time for a change of terrain.” (AVA, 4/12/95)

Acclaimed local photographer and journalist George Rose wrote a letter to the editor commenting, “There will be few tears shed upon hearing about the impending departure of Anderson Valley’s official greeter, Bruce Anderson....His

idea of hard-hitting investigative journalism is to libel and call people childish names....Mr. Anderson is nothing more than a bully misusing the power of the press.” (Santa Rosa Press-Democrat, 5/1/95) Ten years earlier, Rose made this comment about Anderson: “When he’s behind a typewriter he goes nuts.” (Wall Street Journal, 8/20/85)

***“When he’s behind
a typewriter he
goes nuts.”***
—George Rose

When Bari died in March, 1997 from a fast-spreading breast cancer, there was an outpouring of grief from all over the North Coast, including many former antagonists. But not Bruce Anderson. He published an anti-eulogy in his paper (3/12/97), and also as a letter to the editor in the Ukiah Daily Journal (3/13/97). In it, Anderson called Bari “vain,” “deeply flawed,” and “often not very nice to people.” He accused her of “vilifying persons she perceived as threatening to her position as the Northcoast’s top enviro gun.” He accused her supporters of “distorting her memory on a scale reminiscent of Eva Peron.” Bari was ineffectual compared to more conventional timber opponents like Helen Libeu, claimed Anderson, and worse, Bari “capitulated to L-P at Albion and, last summer, to Charles Hurwitz at Headwaters.”

Remarkably, in a transparent attempt to bolster his credibility when criticizing Bari, Anderson would write two years later that “I was a good friend of Judi Bari’s.” (AVA, 9/29/99) As usual, he assumed that his readers’ memories were not only short, but nonexistent.

Anderson’s theories about the bombing of Judi Bari changed to match the state of his relations with her.

In the beginning, he espoused the obvious—that she was attacked because of her political threat to the timber industry:

“I’ve been convinced from the first that the attack on Bari was the work of Louisiana-Pacific whose leadership and upper-echelon employees have always

conducted themselves in an utterly ruthless manner...Bari was attacked because she was meeting with loggers already hostile to L-P with a view to forming an environmental coalition...." (AVA, 8/19/92) "Mike Sweeney certainly didn't do it....the answer lies somewhere in the timber industry." (AVA, 5/29/91)

***"Mike Sweeney
certainly didn't do it."***

—Bruce Anderson, 1991

Once he unleashed his feud with Bari, Anderson began to cast around for ways to smear her with responsibility for her own car bombing. This was a tricky task, because it was the same baseless accusation that the FBI had made when they arrested her in her hospital bed.

Nevertheless, Anderson decided to unleash this libel along with all the others. In 1994, he published a long article implying Bari's guilt: "A surprising number of people think Bari and a small group of her friends were planning a bombing in the Santa Cruz area when the device exploded prematurely beneath Bari's car seat." (AVA, 10/5/94)

By 1996, he was being blunt: "What I believe is that JUDI BARI KNOWS MORE THAN SHE CAN SAY ABOUT THE BOMBING BECAUSE IF SHE TELLS THE TRUTH SHE AND SEVERAL OTHER MOSTLY YOUNG PEOPLE WILL BE IN BIG TROUBLE. This is what I have come to think about it. Is it clear enough?" (AVA, 2/14/96, capitals in original)

But Anderson did little with this latest slur before it became known that Bari was dying of breast cancer. Even he had the sense to tone down his libels in the face of that tragedy.

Following her death, Anderson continued his occasional swipe at Bari and her civil rights lawsuit, until he discovered an exciting new opportunity for attack. This was provided by Irv Sutley, a Sonoma County radical gadfly whom Bari had accused of engaging in dirty tricks against her before the bombing. Bari put these suspicions in her 1994 book, *Timber Wars*. This caused Sutley great distress, and he and a circle of radical political friends in Sonoma County fought back against Bari in a campaign of steadily increasing virulence.

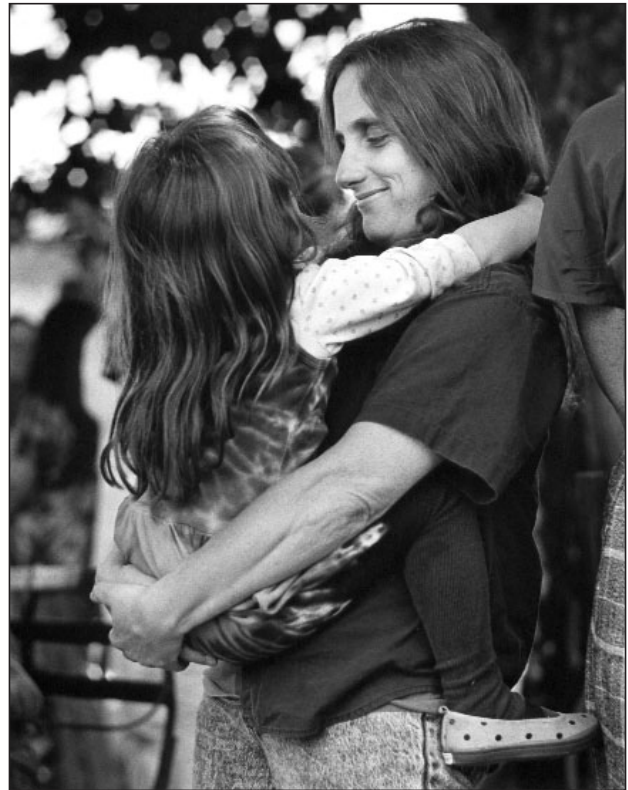
For Sutley, the best way to shake off the lingering suspicions that he was somehow involved in the bombing was to accuse somebody else. So Sutley persuaded freelance writer and fringe conspiracy enthusiast Ed Gehrman to concoct a case that Bari hadn't been bombed by either timber, the FBI, or Sutley, but instead by ex-husband Mike Sweeney (me). According to Gehrman's own account, Sutley got him working on this theory in the mid-1990's.

It was a daunting task, since no evidence whatsoever existed then or now to link Sweeney to the bombing, and Bari herself had explained why he couldn't have been the bomber. "My ex-husband and I have a cooperative relationship in our divorce, and he has no motive at all to bomb me," she wrote in her book *Timber Wars* (p. 139).

Sweeney was a hundred miles away, Bari explained. "...the bomb in my car had a 12-hour timer, so it couldn't have been placed anywhere but Oakland, where I stayed the night before it exploded." (*Timber Wars*, p. 313)

This made it impossible for Sweeney to have been the bomber, Bari concluded. "Mike was taking care of our children at his girlfriend's house when the bomb was planted, and she can verify that Mike did not leave her house at any time when he could have had an opportunity to place the bomb." (*Timber Wars*, p. 139)

As a conspiracy theorist, Gehrman wasn't discouraged by these realities. His other investigative forays included claims that aliens had landed at Roswell, New Mexico, where secret autopsies were done on their bodies, and an article claiming AIDS was a U.S. government conspiracy. He pieced together malicious gossip from several of Bari's enemies to fabricate a story of domestic conflict between Bari and Sweeney. Then he added a novel twist—supposedly scientific literary



Judi Bari—Bruce Anderson's target, especially after her death when she can no longer answer him.

Photo © by Evan Johnson

analysis suggesting Sweeney could have been the author of an anonymous letter taking credit for the bombing. This analysis was provided by Donald Foster, an English professor, who claimed to use computers to identify authors by their literary style.

Foster is an old-fashioned charlatan who could have walked right out of the pages of a Mark Twain novel. He was able to pass himself off as an expert literary detective for several years (to the indignation of legitimate scholars) until he exposed himself in a comical series of frauds. He got caught offering himself to both sides in the sensational JonBenet Ramsey case, first telling the mother he knew “absolutely and unequivocally” that she was innocent, and then turning around and telling the police he could identify her as the perpetrator. Earlier Foster became obsessed with the internet postings of a fan of the case, and faxed his literary agent that he had discovered that this fan was actually JonBenet’s male half brother and had certainly written the incriminating ransom note. It turned out that the internet fan was a 48-year-old North Carolina housewife.

The climax of the Don Foster story came in 2002 when he was forced to admit that his original claim to fame, the discovery that William Shakespeare was the anonymous author of an obscure Elizabethan funeral elegy, was false. (New York Times, 6/20/02). [More on Foster at www.colemanhoax.com/foster_subpage.htm]. Eventually, Foster would admit that the alleged technique of computer analysis of text was bogus (Santa Barbara News-Press, 8/11/03). What Foster had been doing all along was just guessing at “results” he thought people wanted to hear, or would get him attention.

But before his self-destruction, Foster was recruited into the Judi Bari mystery. Ed Gehrman claims he gave Foster a selection of writings from a small number of people associated with Judi Bari and Foster obliged Gehrman by asserting that Sweeney’s writings most closely resembled the anonymous letter claiming responsibility for the bombing. But Foster hedged by noting there was no assurance that Gehrman’s small pool really included the actual author of the anonymous letter. And he would later admit the link to Sweeney was “inconclusive” (email, 5/11/00). But it was enough for Gehrman. He published an article in an obscure conspiracy theory magazine demanding Sweeney be investigated as the likely bomber.

This bizarre stew was very tasty to Anderson, who quickly realized it gave him a weapon against the reputation of Judi Bari far more sensational than anything he had been able to concoct on his own.

Anderson quickly forgot his past assertions, including: “Mike Sweeney certainly didn’t do it.” (AVA, 5/29/91) and “The simple truth of the matter is that Bari and Sweeney separated peacefully and cooperatively.” (AVA, 5/11/94). Overnight in 1999, he became the leading booster of the Sutley-Gehrman theory, adding numerous inventions of his own and claiming that Bari herself was his source. Sometimes he offers the alternative theory that Sweeney built the bomb and Bari was knowingly transporting it. (“There is also the possibility he built the bomb for some hare-brained scheme of Judi Bari’s”) (AVA, 9/29/99) Week after week, he filled the AVA with every falsehood and slander he could find against Sweeney, Bari, Bari’s supporters, and anyone who dared speak up in protest against his attempted lynching. He spurned demands that he produce actual evidence, anything at all, to prove his libels.

His own brother, Rob Anderson, who Bruce had entrusted with the editorship of the AVA when he was jailed for contempt of court, broke with him over Bruce’s obsession with Judi Bari and Mike Sweeney: “The AVA is bombing its own credibility every week...chewing over the same cud of rumor, half-truth and baseless accusation,” Rob Anderson wrote in March, 2000 in his own newsletter, Mendoland.

Anderson demanded that the Mendocino County District Attorney, Norman Vroman, open an investigation of Sweeney. Vroman declined: “I am not investigating anything. I have nothing to investigate and you can quote me on that.” (Ukiah Daily Journal, 5/30/99) When questioned on the radio about Anderson’s claims, Vroman dismissed them as “conjecture, innuendo, speculation, guesses.” (KZYX radio, 5/24/99).

Outraged, Anderson widened his net. He claimed Sweeney was being “protected

"I am not investigating anything. I have nothing to investigate and you can quote me on that."

—District Attorney
Norman Vroman

by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors, the Northcoast media, and Mendocino County law enforcement.” (AVA, 5/17/00)

Undeterred by this formidable array of imaginary conspirators, Anderson set out to use the bogus accusation against Sweeney as a weapon to undermine financial support for the federal civil rights lawsuit by Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney against the FBI and City of Oakland. The lawsuit stemmed from the outrageous conduct of the FBI and police following the bombing. For weeks, the authorities defamed Bari and Cherney as the bombers, lying about the physical evidence, and generally trampling on their civil rights. Suing the federal government is practically impossible for ordinary citizens, but it was Bari’s dying wish in 1997 that the lawsuit be fought to the finish.

In 2000, the lawsuit was moving closer to trial and supporters were working hard to try to raise enough money to keep the legal team together. Anderson falsely claimed Sweeney was one of the plaintiffs, and therefore would reap ill-gotten gains from a successful verdict. On its front page May 17, 2000, the AVA proclaimed:

“The Bari-Cherney-Sweeney axis is attempting to collect \$20 million from the Oakland Police Department and the federal government for a crime begun by a private citizen right here in Mendocino County. The Bari-Cherney-Sweeney swindle is the biggest fraud to hit Mendocino County since Jim Jones, and like Jim Jones, Mendocino County has so far functioned as co-conspirator in an effort by three unscrupulous persons to bilk taxpayers out of \$20 million...For ten years a small group of liars and hustlers have claimed that Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney were targets of an FBI and/or Big Timber murder plot. Why? Darryl Cherney has parlayed the bomb into a PC show biz career for himself while other media-driven opportunists associated with him have similarly earned their livings peddling this mythical version of events.” (AVA, 5/17/00)

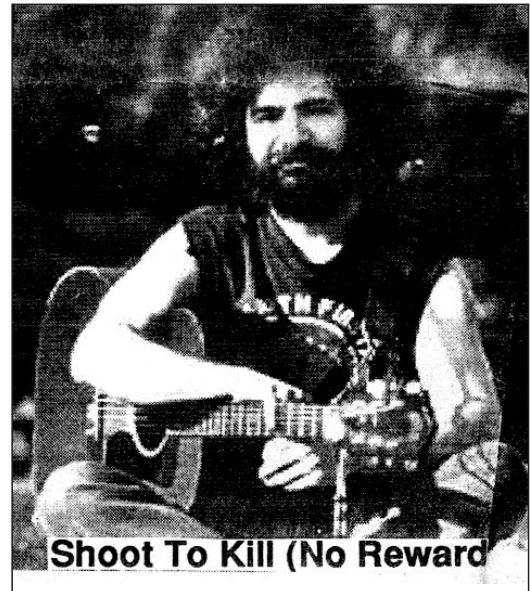
***Anderson’s theories
grew increasingly
strange***

A year later, Anderson got his hands on a fund-raising appeal by the lawsuit’s support group, Redwood Summer Justice Project, and accused the group of “brazen, mercenary mythologizing...in the hopes they can convert it all to a \$20 million federal payday for themselves.” And later, “The Redwood Summer Justice Project,

fastened ghoulishly and profitably to Judi Bari's corpse, has engaged in fraudulent fundraising practices and circular pay-outs to its friends and allies for ten years now." (AVA, 2/7/01)

Anderson's theories became increasingly strange. He proclaimed "Mike Sweeney was most likely the FBI's primary snitch here during the Redwood Summer period which accounts for the FBI's failure to arrest him and charge him in the bombing of his ex-wife." Anderson also proclaimed Bari's key organizing base, the Mendocino Environmental Center (MEC), "was established as a federal listening post." Anderson demanded to know, "Why were the MEC's phone lines re-wired immediately after the Bari bombing?" (AVA, 6/8/01)

Anderson's attacks failed and the lawsuit supporters were able to raise enough money to keep their legal team working on a shoestring. Against all expectations, the case came to trial in Oakland in April, 2002. Bruce Anderson loudly offered himself as a witness for the FBI against Bari and Cherney, but was ignored. After a long trial and long deliberations, the jury gave a stunning \$4.4 million damage verdict in favor of Bari and Cherney, unanimously finding that the FBI and police had violated their civil rights by falsely arresting them and defaming them after the bombing. Fully 80% of the damages were for violating the pair's First Amendment rights, vindicating Bari and Cherney's claim that law enforcement tried to frame them for the bombing so as to discredit them and disrupt their political organizing in defense of the forests.



(AVA , November 27, 2002)

The verdict was widely acclaimed as long-overdue justice for Bari and Cherney and an important precedent for protection of the rights of political activists. But Anderson was livid. "I think Darryl Cherney is a con artist — a hustler," Anderson told the media. "I've regarded Cherney as a showbiz figure who adopted the trees. He uses the environment and this lawsuit to raise money. I can't believe the feds let him get away with it." (San Francisco Chronicle, 6/14/02)

A few months later, Anderson printed Cherney's photo in the Advertiser, under the words, "Shoot to Kill (No Reward)." (AVA, 11/27/02)

Cherney wasn't amused and filed a complaint with the District Attorney. So Anderson ran the photo again and again.

The Santa Rosa Press-Democrat was provoked to run an editorial about the incident titled, "Senseless Stunt." The editorial asked, "Makes you wonder what else he considers comedy. Snuff films?" (12/6/02)

Tolerance is one of the few virtues in our culture. "Freedom of the Press" is practically a religion, as it should be. But every freedom has its abusers and how we handle such abuse is the real test of our society.

Most sociopaths are limited to raving on the sidewalk. Bruce Anderson manages to put out a newspaper every week, using a show of poverty and likely sheltering of assets to dodge the threat of litigation. His record of doing this for 20 years, lying without limit, is a kind of tribute to the demonic energy which has attracted readers who don't really care whether or not his insults are true or false, as long as they amuse.

But the residents of Mendocino County, and especially the Anderson Valley, aren't amused. They are the week-to-week targets of his lies and fail to see the quaint charm of this "country editor" who is occasionally featured in wry profiles by major newspapers. The onslaught of disinformation and ridicule has been especially demoralizing to community activists who are so often his targets.

On-the-street comments on Bruce Anderson recorded by one reporter were:

"Mean-spirited trash—that's all he prints,' said one Boonville retiree, who hastened to add: 'But don't you tell him I said it.'"

"He's nasty, a bully,' declared Robert Glover, a lifelong resident of the region. 'Most people only read the paper for defensive reasons—to make sure he hasn't taken off on you.'"

"In a sense,' explained a sheriff's deputy who asked not to be named, 'you haven't arrived until you've been sliced and diced in the AVA.'"

(Los Angeles Times, 2/14/96).

It's hard for outsiders to appreciate the chilling effect Bruce Anderson has on ordinary civic life in Anderson Valley. Faced with the certainty that sooner or later nasty lies will be printed about them in the Valley's only publication, countless people have quit boards and commissions, or avoided any activity that's likely to draw Bruce Anderson's attention. Some have moved away altogether. Not surprisingly, they don't want to talk about it on the record.

Eventually most people in Mendocino County just decide to ignore him, if they can. A year before her death, Judi Bari wrote to a concerned supporter, "I don't care what Bruce thinks of my personality or politics. He needs to realize that some things are bigger than his petty rivalries." (Letter to Eric Kirk, 2/14/96)

But being ignored is the one thing Bruce Anderson can't stand. He responds with the bigger hoax, the more brazen publicity stunt and nastier insults in an increasingly frantic attempt to make people pay attention. Whether this will work for him depends on how the people of Mendocino County will balance their tolerance for a free press with their respect for the right of their neighbors to live in peace.





**Liar Unlimited: The lurid history of Bruce Anderson
and the Anderson Valley Advertiser**

Available online at
www.LairUnlimited.com