

ENTERTAINMENT

Shaw again writes of what he knows

New book offers camaraderie for elderly, insight for those not yet there

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Bob Shaw’s latest book comes with a warning.

“If you have not yet reached your 80th birthday, put this book down. Do not read it. It will be bad for your health and general well-being. If you have bought the book, be sure to keep your receipt — you may want your money back. The library won’t want it. Give it to a fellow troglodyte or a poor homeless wretch you meet on the street.”

Robert MacGregor Shaw, 92, says “The Joys of Old Age — Revealed by a Professional Curmudgeon” is based on experience. It can be purchased at Amazon.com.

“When you get old, certain other things happen that you didn’t expect and it’s a report, really, of events, habits, ways of life that you encounter when you get old — with tongue in cheek,” he said of the book.

Shaw is and always has been a writer. He’s authored four books following a long and lively newspaper career.

“I have been writing all my life,” he said. “It seemed to be the natural thing for me to do.”

He served as editor of the Falls High School student newspaper, prior to graduation in 1940, then spent four years with the U.S. Coast Guard during World War II. He received a bachelor’s

degree from the University of Minnesota in 1949 and later a master’s degree in journalism. He worked for several newspapers and the Associated Press, and served as an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Washington in Seattle. He returned to Minnesota and spent 19 years as the manager of the Minnesota Newspaper Association. He now lives in Edina.

His profile, located on the back cover and below the warning, gives an indication of the man’s personality: “In the winter, he writes books and mopes a lot.”

Shaw admits he enjoys exercising his facetious nature in his writing. “But we’re making jokes about some serious things,” he said. “It’s the definition of satire.”

For example, he said among the joys of old age is slowing down — “slowing in front of the bully driver behind me. Some people would thank that kind of strange, not a joy of old age. But it was for me. I really like to do that. It gave me a lot of pleasure to frustrate the bully.”

He said his book is for all ages: It commiserates about age with his peers and gives younger people an idea of what’s coming “before you know it.”

He said he’s unsure of the reaction to his book. “I would like to say, ‘Oh, yes, people love it,’” he said. “But I have

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Bob Shaw
Author



some friends who like it, but they’re saying it because they don’t want to hurt my feelings.”

Shaw said authoring books is different than newspaper writing, though he said he enjoys both styles. He combined the two styles when years ago he wrote what he calls “a pretty sizable book” titled “Life in the Back Shop” about the people who came up through the ranks of weekly newspapers in the day of setting Linotype, the first mechanizing of setting type for books and newspapers later replaced by computers.

“It was a miserable existence,” he said of the early days of newspaper production. “But I had a joy in writing that. I had a good response, with people saying ‘That’s how it was.’”

“And, that’s how it will stay; people will read about it for maybe a century,” he

continued.

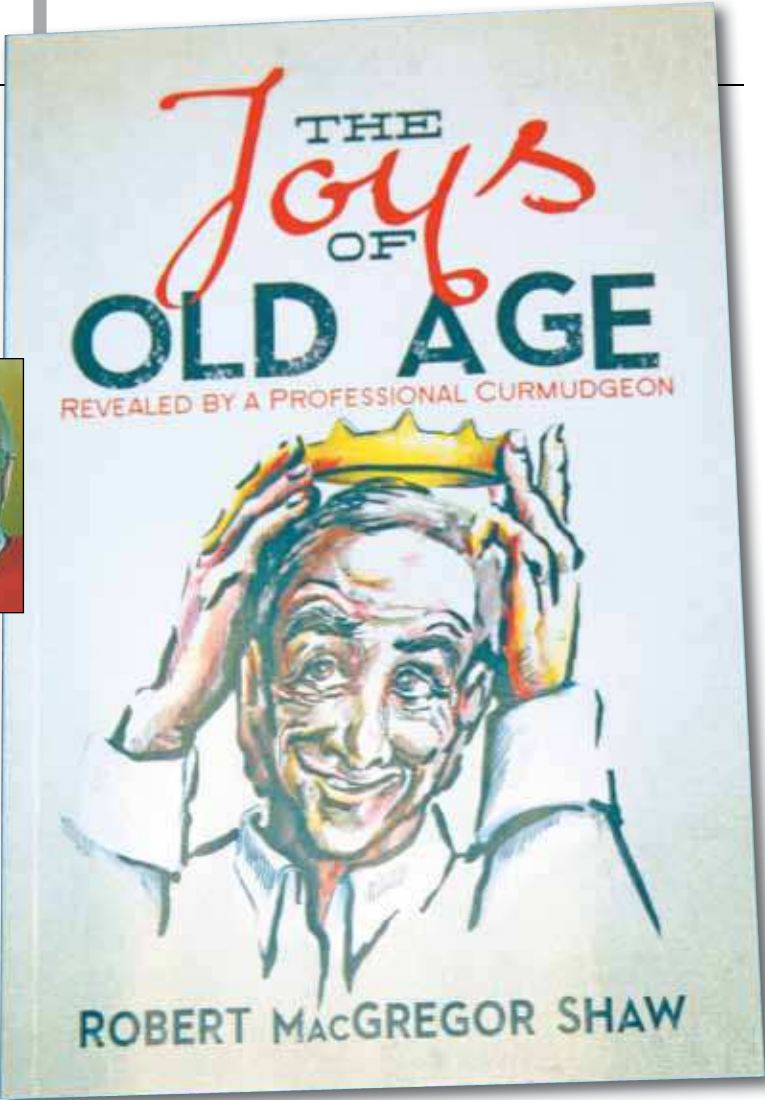
Putting into words thoughts that will be read by future generations is an important part of the publishing process, he said.

Shaw said he’s under no illusion that he will someday be a big-time author. Instead, he said writing and publishing something that pleases family and friends is a part of what’s important to him.

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Making people laugh with his words is also part of the joy Shaw experiences by writing.

“It’s like telling a joke



personally,” he said. “If they look at you and don’t laugh it’s painful. But if they laugh, roll on the floor, slap their knee, you’ve been richly paid for your effort. That’s what I enjoy.”

Shaw already has planned for his next work a collection of short stories. Expect it out in another six months, he said.

And his newspaper work appears to have prepared him for writing the short story.


“The newspaper work — it’s words, thousands, millions of words every day you are working with words,” he

said. “You are not out exercising or doing the routine work. In newspaper work, it’s something different everyday, it’s not the same old thing as it is for many people, on assembly lines or in whatever it’s the same old thing. Newspaper work is not that way. Every day is different.”

Despite that thrill of knowing each day writing at a newspaper would bring a different experience, he says it was time for him to do something different.

“It wears you out,” he said of newspaper work. “It’s very exhausting. No, I don’t miss it very much.”

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