

Hello,

I wondered if the inquiry would find my case interesting I was the subject of a story which was in all essentials untrue. The reporters who put their names to the story in the Daily Mail and Express had never spoken to me or it would seem done any research to check their facts prior to submitting the article. Any Google search of my name alone without any other details would have shown them the story was untrue. The link to the Daily Mail retraction is here <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2112740/Lyn-Marie-Cunliffe.html>

Though it took me many weeks and the intervention of the PCC to gain the Mails response. The Daily Mail also trawled my internet sites, business site, blog ,flickr etc looking for the tiniest thing they could use against me to the PCC. They also refused to accept my word until I submitted business accounts and called me a liar to the PCC up to that point. My account and the details of how the story came to the Newspaper attention, how it was reported, the newspapers behaviour and the damage it has caused is here <http://abigailsateliers.wordpress.com/2012/03/10/many-thanks-press-complaints-commissionthe-daily-mail-has-issued-a-retraction/>

The PCC case number is
PCC REF 115839

Elizabeth Cobbe was the person who was in charge of the case and I should like to praise her efforts and those of the PCC who were extremely effective and helpful.

The Express is still running the story and has not answered either emails sent directly from me or the emails forwarded to it by the PCC.

I should like to praise to the inquiry the excellent response of the Guardian whose Columnist Lucy Mangan did not though she did not actually write an article on me made mention of the stories from the other papers in a feature. Once contacted by me they immediately removed their article and issued a correction that was prominent and clear, they also sent personal emails apologizing and made every effort to put right their mistake. They restored my faith in our press.

Yours sincerely
Mrs LM Cunliffe

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

Date 7/5/2012

MARCH 10, 2012 · 1:10 PM

Many thanks Press complaints Commission, the Daily Mail has issued a retraction

The Daily Mail has finally admitted that its article “Do you come Eyre often” which claimed I always dressed as Charlotte Bronte is untrue, its retraction is here

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2112740/Lyn-Marie-Cunliffe.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>

To summarise the Mail has conceded it has never spoken to me and merely published under Lauren Paxmans name a story bought from a news agency.

While I suppose I ought to be magnanimous in victory this has been a bitter and hard battle and I feel unable to accord the Mail the credit so clearly due to the Guardian and Telegraph who had corrected their genuine mistake promptly and behaved in every respect with decency and rectitude.

The Mails retraction is by contrast is entirely due to the efforts of the Press complaints commission as prior to their intervention the Daily Mail had refused to answer my emails.

The PCC negotiations where extremely prolonged and the Daily Mail behaved in an appalling manner. Its replies to emails have at times been extremely distressing. It has trawled, by its own admission my blog, my flickr profile and my Ebay listings (and its clear from statements made to the PCC it has also been following my facebook page). It has searched for links it could forward to the PCC to try to support its case. It has suggested that by being forced to sell assets (which was due to decreased business and made no mention of the story) I had “profited” from the story and because a tag on a photo in my flickr profile used “crazy costume Lady “(posted after the Mails story surfaced) I couldn’t complain about their story making me look unbalanced. It also claimed I lied about the nature of my work and would not budge from this statement until forwarded official accounts from my business and a statement from a past client this despite its searching of blog and flickr posts which make it clear I do wide ranging costume work .It claimed in one email to the PCC it had talked to me to explain the story and that I was merely upset by the reaction to it and had actually said everything they claimed but was trying to pretend otherwise. In short it insulted me in every possible way during the negotiations and showed a lack of concern for the truth that is breathtaking. I has shown not the least regard for either common decency or journalistic standards.

When it has finally conceded defeat. It has never expressed any contrition and tried at every turn limit the scope of its retraction and the prominence accorded it.

As this post is attracting attention I thought I would share some of the comments made to the PCC by the Mail in answer to a detail read through of the article and comments they requested.

First I thought I would share some of their comments on my blog etc sent to the PCC (I did make clear to the Mail I would make emails public if I felt they merited it)

Mail wrote:

6) Finally perhaps in relation to Mrs Cunliffe's most fervent points, we would say the following.

- Risk of not being able to get future employment. She has quoted the belief she has been branded a 'mad woman' and that 'no schools will want to employ me for the same reason'. Interestingly in October on her own public Flickr account Mrs Cunliffe refers to herself on her account as 'crazy costume lady'. We have attached evidence of this also. Also Mrs Cunliffe on her own blog states she is doing well selling her Bronte costumes of Ebay since publication: <http://abigailsateliers.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/ebay-more-bronte-sales/>

(the Mail forgot the mention that the crazy lady comment had been posted after their story and was in reference to it and that likewise the ebay sales were clearly the result of being unable to get certain work due to their article, that the sales were made at a loss and that the actual listings made no mention of the article)

Next the Mail claimed I lied and only retracted their statement to that effect once forwarded accounts.

Mail writes:

- Regarding this passage of complaint I would emphasise that IF Mrs Cunliffe was paid for her work dressing as Bronte it was not often and not on a contract, and she did not officially represent the Parsonage.

Re their now retracted alleged quotes, the Mail wrote:

Lyn-Marie added: 'My husband has also been very supportive of me – I couldn't do any of it without him; he is my Mr Rochester.'

This is easiest quote to query. I never said this. I do not like the character of Mr Rochester, no one who knows me or anyone who has read my blog would ever believe that I would use that term to describe anyone I respected or loved. It was tacked onto an actual comment I made that my husband supported my work and that without his encouragement and help my business would never have succeeded. The mention of work was removed and the Mr Rochester comment tacked onto it.

Again shorthand supports accuracy on our behalf as she does say her husband John is like Mr Rochester. (See Cunliffe2 pdf).

Mail wrote in conclusion:

Apologies if this is somewhat extended reply but when faced with such an extended and seemingly undirectional complaint we wanted to try and cover as much as possible. We strive to make sure the subjects of our stories in instances like this are as happy as possible. We cannot account for changes in their outlook after publication or their reaction to online comment or general public discussion of their story, but we do try to warn them of such things. I hope this is satisfactory and resolves the matter. Please do let me know if you need

anymore. As an agency we stand by our story and the Mail Online's publication of it, but if a concession is made we would not feel hard done by if the article was removed, however unwarranted, if only to maintain Mrs Cunliffe's piece of mind.

My note

(these closing comments which are breathtaking in their hypocrisy and are clearly contradicted by their retraction where they admit to never speaking to me)

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Note on context to explain to everyone who has asked:

The Mail story was based on an interview by Caters, the news agency mentioned in the retraction. The reporter mentioned was Tammy Hughes. She contacted a past client who I had done work for and they forwarded her email, as the article seemed to be linked to past work I had done in the local area and be about it I felt duty bound to contact Ms Hughes as I get asked from time to time for details on the area or a quick summary of my work for inclusion in articles on radio. I made clear that I was only interested in an interview if the story would benefit the local area, Ms Hughes took details of local places and business I suggested for a photo shoot, when I was collected by the photographer he said it was "the biggest brief he had ever been given" yet it did not include any of the local places or businesses with the exception of the Parsonage, the photographer spent the day with me, took several photos with my family then did a "working day" shoot, photos in Haworth, talking to tourists, then mentioned he had no record of places or business to photograph, I asked him to include some and we took photos on Main street Haworth, the final hour or so of the shoot was spent at Mc Donalds where I was photographed queuing and drinking coffee, and Sainsburys, and in it finished back in our area and was supposed to include me in several other costumes but by then we were both bored so called it a day after one costume change. The shoot lasted from late morning to late afternoon around 5 hours. Of course only the sensational ones were used.

Ms Hughes spoke to me for around an hour asked about my work for Haworth and the Parsonage and seemed to think I was an employee of the Parsonage, I made clear I was not anyones employee I was a business woman, costumer and educator, and we spent most of the hour talking about my work, the 1940s work with old people, the tourism work for Haworth the Bronte work for the BBC and the Parsonage. I spoke to her later and she mentioned the story would "go in magazines" and I may get a small fee if it was published. I said that was nice to know as normally I didn't get paid for doing media work for the area and it would make up for spending the day in costume.

I later discovered Ms Hughes had been told gossip about a woman who walked around in Bronte costume and seems to have contacted me with the crazy lady story in mind and only interviewed me to try to find details that would support it, a fact that seems born out by her shorthand notes as forwarded to the PCC. She or the newspapers completely manufactured the quotes and most of the story with the exception of my name and family details. I suspect she only interviewed me in order to get the photo shoot.

I am not sure how I attracted the attention of Caters. Tammy Hughes and the Mail claimed it was by one local who contacted them. I have had reports from Haworth of a woman/reporter asking questions about me in local shops as early as summer, though I can't imagine that to

be Hughes as at that time though I was fairly well known locally for my Haworth work and quite well known online I was pretty much unknown outside of local or costume circles, as it was before the BBC work or Jane Eyre work.

This retraction leaves only the Daily Express deliberately continuing to run a story known to be untrue. It does not seem to have realised that with the Mails Admission that it merely used a story bought from Caters the Express is clearly shown to be merely adding its reporter Paul Jeeves name to a story he obviously had no input in whatsoever.

Footnote impact of the story:

In reply to everyone who has suggested I over reacted or have no sense of humour. I do have a sense of humour and I can see how the original story seemed funny and harmless.

However apart from the principle of not letting the papers tell lies, this story has been extremely upsetting and caused a great many problems mostly because it made me look crazy. I AM my business. My reputation is what brings me my day to day income. The story took every aspect of my work made up lies which twisted it to make it look a part of an unhealthy and silly obsession so it has harmed almost every aspect of my work.

Most damaging was the claim that I was obsessed with Charlotte Bronte and started dressing up three years ago and I spent a lot of my time in Haworth in costume directing people around and talking about the Brontes not one story mentioned I was doing paid work but said it because I was "obsessed".

Unfortunately while it was a tiny part of my working time a big part of my yearly income was from some seasonal (and until last year non Bronte) tourism or promotional work in Haworth and elsewhere in an assortment of costumes talking to tourists, giving out flyers on events and posing for photos for tourists and photographers. It was a change from my usual work and I enjoyed getting out and talking to people from around the world and was proud to represent my area. Now it's impossible to continue as tourists just think I am that crazy woman they saw in the papers.

Re the Bronte part of the story:

Though I am not obsessed with the Brontes I live walking distance from Haworth and was asked last year if I could give some costumed Bronte talks in January which went well and as the year went on the work grew really quickly. I did meet and greet for a New Bronte play at three different venues. I later did some costumed promotional work and readings at the Bronte Parsonage over summer. I was asked to contribute research for a new Bronte venue at Ferdnean, do a play review and co write a play performed in Dec so the work was growing rapidly and before the story it had looked like becoming a big part of our work for 2012. Though I still write I use a pseudonym and I no longer do the other work.

It said I thought of Heathcliff walking the dogs which was untrue but unfortunately we had been preparing flyers for some guided walks for dog owners in 2012 so that's also now impossible.

Re the Photographs we take:

The story originally said my husband was supportive of my obsession and would take photographs of me on the moors as Charlotte, which was not totally true, my husband does

take photos of me and other people in costume but at a lot of venues and the costumes are from all eras. We have been asked to submit artwork for book covers and we use them for the websites, a calendar and notelets etc which we sell locally, on business cards and flyers. Its a major part of how we promote the business but now of course people are reading the story and finding other photos of me in costume online taken by John and reposting them which boosts the story and makes it seem true.

The costume Exhibition mentioned in the Daily Mail:

It said I had been asked to do a costume exhibition at a local venue (which is true) but said it was because I was well-known locally for my "obsession" and didn't mention the displays were from a range of eras, Tudor, 18thc as well as section on the Brontes so it damaged the impact of the exhibition.

There is barely one aspect of the story that has not been catastrophic for my work and reputation.

Signs of the damage done are becoming clearer as the year progresses. From our very first Ester in businesses we have always been booked up by now for Easter but this year so far we have only two bookings both from old customers, though we continue to get repeat bookings from established customers we have had not one new customer since the story appeared.

UPDATE

We have had a couple of new customers this year but the bookings overall have dropped from an average of three per week to an average of three per month. We have usually been pretty much booked up by now for Christmas but at present we have only one booking for Dec. I have a shoulder injury and decided primarily due to health considerations but also taking the fall in bookings into account to change the main focus of my business to costume hire and design. I sold most of my old costumes and props and I will be using some of the proceeds for fabric to make new costumes more suitable for hiring. I am also making costumes to order from time to time.