

My name is Camilla Mortensen, I'm the editor of *Eugene Weekly*, and soon, I will be the newspaper's owner. I am a former co-worker of Elisha Joe Young.

Elisha, I debated for a long time whether I would make a victim's statement on behalf of the paper when it came time for you to be sentenced to prison. I thought that this final action would etch into the public record your crime, your guilt and the punishment you face. I thought that would be enough, and that anything I might say would not cut through whatever veil or denial that you still hide behind.

But I decided to speak today not to the pain I have felt since discovering your selfish deceptions. Instead, I am speaking to you as someone who believes that the full story should be shared.

Elisha, you stole tens of thousands of dollars from your employer, *Eugene Weekly*.

Day-in, day-out, for years, you were stealing money from a newspaper that you know works to make this community and world a better place in which to live. You were in a powerful position, entrusted with the newspaper's finances — and you betrayed that trust.

Embezzlement, by its nature, is an unthinkable crime to its victims. After all, they trust someone they believed would never betray them.

It wasn't unthinkable to you. You knew that your actions were basically destroying the newspaper that employed you.

You made sure every last dollar the *Weekly* had went to feed your addictions. Your actions forced the newspaper to close for the first time ever in its 40-or-so years of life.

The news of *Eugene Weekly's* closure, however temporary, stained its reputation and shook the faith of the many people who had come to trust and believe in the *Weekly*.

Still, in the days after the paper shut down, people came to the office door, crying over the fact that this little newspaper, that for so many thousands of people has been a touchstone in the community, had been ripped out of their hands.

You sought to destroy *Eugene Weekly* in myriad ways. You cancelled the company's insurance, stopped paying bills, halted payments on loans and stiffed the printing company that prints the paper. You left the newspaper bleeding with debt. The newspaper is still rebuilding the trust you sought to destroy, still dealing with the aftermath of all that you did.

You sought to destroy the people with whom you worked for so many years, people who considered you a friend and treated you as family.

When others at *Eugene Weekly* were taking pay cuts, you secretly gave yourself a \$30,000 a year raise. You robbed from your colleagues' futures when you stopped making payments on

employee pensions because you had stolen the money. In the end, you left them empty handed when *Eugene Weekly* had to lay them off only days before Christmas. One day our copy editor had a job. The next he was accepting a food box at his church.

Elisha, you not only sought to destroy *Eugene Weekly* and the people who worked with you, you sought to destroy a woman who trusted you and cared for you and believed in you.

Anita Johnson is a hero in our community and in journalism, someone who selflessly supported *Eugene Weekly*, her newspaper, because she understood the deep civic value it provides.

For years, you looked Anita in the eyes and told her she needed to put more of her money into the paper. You did that over and over and over.

And when she did put more money into the newspaper, believing you were an honest person, you stole the money — no different from if you had slapped her in the face and grabbed cash from her hands.

Anita spent the last year of her life in the wake of your selfish and destructive actions. She died almost a year to the day we discovered that you had taken so much money and mismanaged the finances so badly that her beloved paper had to be shut down.

And yet — Anita lived to see that you, Elisha, had failed to destroy *Eugene Weekly* and the spirit that it inspires.

We returned to work at the paper without pay, shivering in a freezing office because you had stolen the money needed to pay the heating bill.

In doing so, we learned how much Lane County and readers across the country care about *Eugene Weekly*.

We learned how common embezzlement is in our community, and how companies and nonprofits who have been swindled keep silent about the crime to avoid public shame. We decided to be transparent and to use our case to shine a light on this crime and the importance of its investigation and its prosecution.

To be sure, we are still dealing with the impact of what you did. Financially and emotionally. It takes time to heal.

Elisha, you will soon be led off in cuffs to a prison cell. At some future date, you could walk out of prison as the same broken, humiliated and shamed person you are today.

Or, you can take the path followed by your victims. *Eugene Weekly*, its employers and the entire community, who chose to emerge from the wreckage you created and go forward toward renewal.

I can only hope that you use the time to turn yourself around, recover from your addiction, pay your debt to this community and its newspaper, and make amends to those you hurt.