

Proud newspaper tradition more humble these days



BARB GUY

I loved newspapers long before I began writing for one. I was one of those kids perched on a bar stool, feet dangling, reading the paper at the kitchen counter.

I'd pore over articles, Ann Landers and columnist Dan Valentine, and I'd puzzle through the unintelligible non-words of the stock quotes. On Sundays I'd lie on the floor, the colorful comics stretched before me like a carpet, and I'd roll Silly Putty over the faces.

By junior high I wanted to be a journalist. I still have the slip of paper delivered to me in class one day.

"Please call so-and-so at *The Tribune*." Simply put, that was huge. I walked, quaking, to the school's office to return the call. The resulting story, headlined "Pretty elves aid Santa," about a group of girls answering letters

children wrote to the big man, both thrilled and horrified me.

The accompanying photo showed me sitting on my canopy bed with my friend Sue and a mound of Santa mail. Teachers, neighbors, friends of our parents -- it seemed everyone saw the story; it was exciting. I was totally irked, though, because I felt the writer had fabricated my quotes.

My first disillusionment with journalism. The first hedging in the love.

I didn't grow up to become a journalist, but I still love newspapers, *The Trib* and others. And I still get disillusioned. *The Trib* has a lot of trouble with apostrophes and homonyms. In my day, a ninth-grader would get smacked in the head with a *Tribune* -- or whatever was handy -- for the errors I see in *The Trib*.

But whining too much about grammar only makes one sound like a prig. And it masks a larger and much more important point. *The Trib* isn't a thing, it's a group of people -- people who have studied hard to work at the paper, people who hone their craft and care about beauty, people who are passionate about getting things right.

They are educated in the proud tradition of muckraking, or researching and publicizing the

misconduct of prominent members of the community. Journalists shine lights in dark places and tell us what they find. They tell the truth even when it's dangerous to do so. It's important to note that journalists are trained in -- and bound by -- ethics, unlike just about everyone else on the Internet.

The terrible fact is that *The Tribune* is shrinking. A reader recently wrote he was afraid squirrels might carry the paper off his lawn.

The venerable and amazingly named *Post-Intelligencer* in Seattle announced it will cease to exist unless a buyer comes forward. *The Rocky Mountain News* in Denver stopped its presses forever 10 days ago after losing \$16 million.

Newspaperdeathwatch.com chronicles the carnage: *Cincinnati Post*, *Baltimore Examiner*, on and on.

We're busy right now talking of saving banks and car manufacturers, but there's no talk of a newspaper stimulus package.

We get our news online these days, they say. Newspapers are dinosaurs, they say. I say, for my paltry subscription fee I can help keep a mighty and principled tradition going. Nothing is like a daily newspaper. Nothing. It's a

The Salt Lake Tribune

pleasure to read it and an honor
to be part of it.

I'll keep subscribing as long as
they keep publishing. We
subscribe to three newspapers at
our house and each one of them
holds a place no other news
source could ever fill.

When I started reading *The Trib*,
Santa was a really fat guy and he
smoked like a chimney. Lately
he's been forced by societal
changes to undergo some
transformations, but he has
managed to stay relevant. I hope
my newspaper can do the same.

*BARB GUY is a regular contributor to
these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.*