

LESS BILL
DETAILS
ABOUT
SUNDAY
SUPPLEMENT

Newspaper Days (Susan's edit w/tracking)

This is the LATEST one!!!!!!

Draft

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(Was) Zooms Newspaper Days

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MY STINT IN THE NEWSPAPER BIZ

Twenty-five years from now there will be a name for what's wrong with me. It will be called A.D.D., but here in 1954, my dad sums it all up when he says, "Gary, you just need to apply yourself."

My high school grades are miserable, mostly Ds and Fs, except for my art courses where I shine with all A's. It's a lonely achievement.

I'm good at cartooning, hand lettering, sign-making and oil painting but these things don't count in my upper middle class world where every one of my friends is headed to an ivy league college. The consensus is that I'm failing because I'm not applying myself. Worse, I have earned a lifetime sentence to detention for some legendary misbehaviors, including poetic urinal-art drawings made on tile walls with found lipsticks where my hand-lettered masterpiece advises the visitor that quote, "You are now holding Dean Oliver W. Melchior by the neck."

Add this to cherry-bombing of the toilets, vine wrestling using the tall window pole to drag outside ivy into the classroom during tests, organized group humming attacks where ten of my pals start quiet humming as the classroom clock second-hand passes the number twelve at exactly ten o'clock artfully backfiring dad's Pontiac directly into an open window during math finals. As a result, I don't qualify for graduation or for any formal higher education. No matter how good my painting portfolio is, art schools require passing grades. Rhode Island School of Design and Pratt don't respond to my application, probably assuming it is a joke. A sympathetic assistant principal maneuvers around the State rules by averaging my art grades with my required courses to fudge me up to a diploma level. My guess is that they'd rather slip me a shaky diploma than have to deal with me for another year.

So, now I'm a high school graduate (sort of) and as a holding action between school and life, I take the train from Scarsdale into New York City every day for classes at the Art Student's League, a famous non-degree school for artists of every age. Finally, I'm doing something I qualify for: a non-degree. (BREAK?)

Meanwhile, I'm living at home, jobless and staring into the abyss of want-ads for boring jobs. I consider sign painting because of my hand-lettering skills, but there are no positions. I'm on the verge of applying for a position as an ambulance driver because driving is fun even if bleeding is not.

Finally, Dad convinces a publisher-friend to employ me in an entry-level job as a copy boy at the weekly Shopping News in White Plains, NY. I'm to deliver press proofs on foot to local advertisers and drive long round-trips, using the boss's big silver-blue Cadillac, to bring corrections to the printing plant, 50 miles across the river in New Jersey. My job fails to impress any of my friends because nobody has ever heard of the Shopping News except my friend Mike, who says, "Oh yeah, that junk stuff that mom throws out." The best part of the job is getting to drive my boss's car.

On Friday after my first week, I open my pay envelope to find a salary stub and cash amounting to \$31.80. I am shocked to see that my \$35 salary has been reduced by taxes and something called Social Security. I reluctantly accept the taxes part, but Social Security is something I can't get my hands on for forty-seven years. It seems crazy. (BREAK?)

Within a few months Bill, our ambitious publisher, turns the Shopping News into an all-county weekly newspaper to compete with the established regional dailies and small-town weeklies. Bill is a large, barrel-chested senatorial-looking man with wavy grey hair and the twinkle-eyed animation of a sideshow barker. He is both a scoundrel and publishing genius. He invented the Sunday Supplement so small town newspapers could afford to have a magazine with entertainment and human interest stories inserted. Sunday magazines gave local newspapers a way to print on Sundays without using their own staff talent to write.

The Sunday supplement, usually only offered by big-city papers, the small local paper to publish one more day every week using bigger stories carrying national ads. The idea was a huge success and Bill has sold it for a lot of money.

Now, for our little weekly shopping news, he hires an editorial staff of reporters along with a multi-talented managing editor who designs a classy-looking tabloid-sized feature-filled real newspaper. We are now officially the Westchester News and I am the office boy.

(BREAK?)

The editorial staff and I are moved into a 20-by-30-foot rented office down the hall. It contains a hodgepodge of beat up second-hand green rubber-topped office desks, a card table, four file cabinets and a tipsy bentwood coat rack. We're all crowded in like campers in a pup tent.

Joe, the reporter is brusque in his open collar white business shirt and a permanent perturbed look on his face. Short and wirey, Joe's tweed sport jacket seems a reluctant nod to business dress. He has a slight wry smile indicating that he is slightly pleased at being very annoyed with everything.

Ruth, our shopping news and homemaker columnist, is best described as very large and billowy or, as my father would politely say, "quite ample."

In between clattering bursts of typing, her face balloons into self-satisfied smiles as if she has just created something brilliant. Whenever I'm anywhere near her desk she stops to tell me about her new Packard Convertible. For all the pride in her voice, the Packard could be her grandchild. When I ask questions about its color, upholstery and horsepower, she turns her back on the typewriter and delivers a prideful litany of the car's features.

Jerome St. George another writer, who smells of expensive cologne is dressed in a camel hair jacket, silk ascot, and French cuff shirts. He looks out of place at his card-table desk. ~~Jerome~~ AND he says he is excited about creating a literature column to bring culture to the region. Jerome keeps busy in the office by making frequent phone calls for lunch dates. Nobody knows why he is here but gossip says that he's independently wealthy and has dreams of buying a newspaper somewhere even though he's never been able to keep a job. The suspicion is that Bill is keeping him around as a source of money in case things get fiscally dicey.

Walter, our collegiate-looking managing editor, tells me that it is best to be nice to Jerome as a kind of job insurance. Walter comes from a seriously impressive journalistic background. In Spain during the Spanish Civil War, he began sending dispatches to TIME Magazine and became a de facto war correspondent.

Later, when he became the editor of the Baltimore Sun, he redesigned the newspaper and their new Sunday Magazine. He became a radio newscaster in South America where he used his

He became a radio newscaster in South America where he used his acquired Castilian dialect for his on-air persona, hiding his New Jersey Presbyterian Anglo heritage from his Spanish-speaking listeners.

Walter's desk sits by a big dirty window next to the flat-topped metal radiator cabinet where everybody sets their coffee cups to keep them warm. His favorite lament is, "Do I have to wait for heat to come on to have a warm cup of coffee or is some great writer going to figure a way to get one in here?"

The staff refers to
~~To me~~, Walter ~~is~~ a Renaissance man, *I think he's* ~~who is~~ movie-star handsome. He can write an engagingly funny or angry editorial in six minutes on his clattering old typewriter and laughs at my jokes. I like Walter.

For the next two years, these four engaging people are my buddies and mentors, teaching me the inside bare-bones basics of the newspaper business. It is ~~a~~ and I am hooked. (MAJOR BREAK)
 8.5 MINS

NOW YOU MOVE INTO ANOTHER 'CHAPTER' EARLY LESSONS ABOUT GAS

One day not long after we've moved into our tight quarters, Bill comes blustering through the door waving a folder of tabloid-size press proofs and a set of car keys. "Gary, take my car and get these proofs out to the printer immediately," he shouts. "Ya gotta do it now or we're gonna loose A&P! You gotta get 'em there by four o'clock."

Bill's usual cocky manner is gone and he looks worried. A&P is our biggest advertiser and they have made price changes in their two-page ad for the next edition, minutes before the deadline. The ad needs to be reset. The corrected proofs must to be taken, immediately, to the printer.

As an 18 year-old, I have a hard time telling when Bill is worried, joking, drunk or a little of each. When drunk, he becomes a practical joker, notorious for his occasional booze-driven stunts. One recent anecdote circling around our office had him driving through the southwest to visit his family. Staggering out of a roadhouse bar into the afternoon sun, he accidentally entered the Sheriff's idling, unoccupied cruiser and drove it, thinking he was in his own car, 75 miles through the desert until a posse of local officers finally caught up with him. He explained that he didn't notice the big red roof light or the word "SHERIFF" in gold leaf capital letters on the door. When jailed, he called someone in the office, 2,000 miles back in New York, to wire bail money. A few years earlier, at a cocktail party where he was trying to get financial backing for a new venture and was well under the influence of a few too many, he was talking with the wife of his potential investor. Suddenly, he removed his fake left eyeball and slipped it into her martini glass. She fainted, spilling both the gin and the eyeball onto the carpet. The result was that Bill joked himself out of the running for the investment and was asked to leave the party.

Now, when he tosses me \$3.00 to cover the tunnel tolls and lunch, I am convinced this is the real deal and I will be a hero. After all, If we lose A&P, we might go out of business. I'm thrilled to be chosen to save the day and possibly my own job.

I feel like the Lone Ranger as I jump into Bill's car with the corrections and take off for Manhattan on the way to New Jersey. Inside the Holland Tunnel I notice that the big Cadillac's gas gauge is firmly planted on empty. After paying the toll, I start looking for a gas station. The gauge is actually now below empty as I coast into a Sunoco station. I do a fast calculation and figure that at 25¢ per gallon I will buy four gallons and have enough left over for return tolls and an extra \$2.00 for me to keep for my blind date tonight. I tell the attendant to put a dollar's worth in the car and then stroll through the muggy August heat to the soda machine for an ice-cold bottle of Coke.

I return and find that the attendant has left the pump running and the bill is \$5.00. I don't have \$5.00, and since I didn't ask for a full tank I stand firm, telling the attendant that because I didn't order that much gas, I am not going to pay for it. He says I could use the gas anyway so just pay up. I'm going to surrender precious date money to pay for a Cadillac owner's gas bill. I tell him I have no money so just take the gas out. He says he can't do that and if I don't pay, he'll call the police.

"OK, good. Call the cops," I say, and stand righteously, arms folded, waiting for justice to arrive. Minutes later, a policeman astride a small three-wheeled motorcycle, the kind used for marking tires and issuing parking tickets, sputters into the station. The officer waves at the attendant and says, "Hi ya' Jerry. Mom says to call her before your shift is up." The cop is the attendant's brother!

He asks me for the car's registration. "I don't have it," I tell him. "It's my boss's car and he's 30 miles away in White Plains and I have only \$2.00 for the gas I ordered." That's all he has to hear. He calls my bluff and tells me to follow him to the tiny Secaucus Police Station where the desk sergeant places me in the only cell until I can produce the registration and pay for the gas. It feels like 100 degrees in the tiny cell, with it's foot-square open window with bars and two benches with a view of the sergeant's desk. I'm the sole prisoner and now I'm not sure which is more uncomfortable, my anxiety-induced sweating or the suffocating stench in the cell from the nearby Secaucus pig farms.

I ask the desk sergeant to call my office and tell them I need help. I hear him explain that he needs the registration to release the car, gas money and a \$25 bond to allow me to leave the jail. He explains that if the gas is paid for, I need not return and the "bond" can be forfeited. He gives directions and hangs up.

An hour later Joe shows up looking very annoyed and swaps the cash bond and the registration for me. I'm freed.

Joe grabs the proofs from Bill's car and tells me he will continue the trip to the printer. Before I leave to return the Caddy to the office, Joe makes me swear to tell Bill that I witnessed him paying the police the bond money because there will be no receipt for the cash. He whispers, "It's going right into the sergeant's pocket."

I have just enough time to get Bill's car to the office and keep my blind date.

Driving back to White Plains through steamy rush-hour traffic, I ponder the life lesson's I've learned today. They are:

- 1) When borrowing a car for a rescue mission, always check the amount of gas on board.
- 2) Sometimes, during a crisis, righteousness will get you into trouble instead of out of it.
- 3) Even when riding silly tricycles, the police have the power to ruin your day.
- 4) No matter how much of a hero you are trying to be, always leave enough room in the schedule to take a shower before a blind date.

NEXT CHAPTER:

-----Free Ice Cream-----