

The Newspaper Life

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I worry about newspapers. I worry that as competition for readers' time and money intensifies we will be so market-driven that we'll perfect the techniques of packaging appealing information and forget the reason we went into journalism.

A newspaper must make a profit – as a stockholder, I applaud our success – but making money is not a newspaper's sole reason for being or the true measure of its success. I make a good deal of money for a person with a minimal interest in making money. But I'm in newspapering because I love the craft and the opportunity the job provides for taking part in community affairs.

The work has its drawbacks. People often ask how journalists can live with the pressure of dealing constantly with complex and controversial issues on deadline. It's Darwinian, I reply. Those who can't do it get out or die.

Some people think editorial writers spending their working hours in splendid isolation thinking lofty thoughts. Baloney. Opinion writing is a contact sport, especially if your name and picture appear in the paper.

Not long ago I was a pallbearer at an old friend's funeral. After we had carried the casket to the hearse, a couple of people I know stopped me to complain about something the *Observer* had failed to do. They are good people and the issue on their minds was important, so I didn't mind hearing them out.

Later a friend who had witnessed the encounter remarked, "You put down the casket and don't take two steps before somebody jumps on you about your work. Does that happen all the time?"

"All the time," I said. "

"Sheesh!" he said. "I wouldn't have your job."

I smiled and thought, *I wouldn't have any other.*