

I'm rich in many different ways

By Ashley Biles

Over the last four years of working at the paper, there have been several days when my job has been less than desirable. I have stood in the freezing rain to cover an event, been nearly hit by cars while taking photos of ribbon cuttings and sat through many long meetings. I have lost countless hours of sleep from working until after midnight to finish a story when on deadline, only to be up before dawn the next day to cover a breakfast meeting, and having a weekend completely off has become a luxury, not a definite thing because the news never stops.

However, even on the worst days, I always thought that I fared better than many other professions. Evidently I was wrong, because newspaper reporter has been listed as the number one worst job in the nation for 2013 by CareerCast.com, beating out lumberjack, enlisted military personnel, actors and oil rig workers in the top five.

The website attributes the low pay, long hours and high stress as reasons the profession has become so unattractive and frankly, I can agree that those are things I think of when wondering why I chose this as a career. But what the article doesn't mention is there are many aspects that make this job great and most importantly, one that I enjoy doing. There is nothing quite like seeing the smile on a child's face when they realize their picture is going to be in the newspaper or hearing how proud a parent is when they submit a photo of their child's college graduation. It is the little things like that which make me happy to do what I do.

One of the greatest joys of my job is getting to meet people and tell the stories of their lives. Sometimes the stories are of an accomplishment, sometimes they are about a need a particular person has and others times they are just an interesting tidbit about an aspect of someone's life; but no matter what the topic of the article, I always enjoy being given the chance to share them with others.

In addition, there has not been a single feature story I have written that did not touch my life in some way. Through those interviews I have learned about the selflessness of a child whose only wish for her birthday was to provide shoes to children that could not afford their own. I have learned of the struggles a family faces when a loved one is fighting a terrible disease and the excitement a veteran feels when he learns there is a mountain in Antarctica named for him. I have laughed and cried with these people and always walk away grateful they welcomed me into their lives for a short while.

My job also affords me the opportunity to meet new people on a daily basis and I have often found people who were once strangers have soon become new friends. One meeting in particular has given me a pen pal who is 96-years-old and lives in Virginia. Mrs. Florine Watson Harper began sending letters to the paper in 2009 with "Recollections" of growing up in Thomaston. She wrote more than 50 articles of days gone by which we ran in The Times and although it has been more than two years since we ran her last one, I have been able to keep in touch with her through letters and phone calls. In a time when the most mail I get is bills that need to be paid, it never fails to bring a smile to my face when I realize there is a letter from Mrs. Florine mixed into the

stack. We have only met in person once, but through our conversations I feel like I have known her forever and have gained a wonderful friend.

It would be easy to focus on the negative aspects of working at a newspaper and agree with the survey that I have the worst job in the nation, but I chose to focus on the flip side. Sure the hours are long, my stress levels often run high and I am by no means monetarily wealthy, but this job has made me rich in many other ways. So, would I say I have the worst job in the nation?

Definitely not, and that is thanks to each of you.

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