

Why I Love Community Newspapers

By Larry Walker

Most of them are small, although there are two or three larger ones with pictures of my show calves and me. All of them are slightly yellowed and somewhat worn by the weight of many years. But I can still read 'em, and I can still remember.

Then there are accounts of loved ones and their departures after lives well-lived. And, political happenings – victories, accomplishments, positions taken, critical letters to the editor and the like, with the positive being in greater numbers, not necessarily because of preponderance of happenings, but more so to do with what was saved.

Of all these boxes of clippings saved perhaps the most cherished is the one from the *Houston Home Journal* of about two column inches telling of the June, 1963 departure of four local boys, Bobby Jones, Jerry Horton, Jerry Wilson and Larry Walker, for Ft. Worth Texas and summer work at Texas Steel Company. It's as if the accounts in this timeless treasure come back to life every time I see and read it.

I must mention three weekly newspapers of particular significance to me: the *Sandersville Progress* delivered to my Walker Grandparent's home on dirt Sparta-Davisboro Road in rural Washington County, Macon County's *Citizen Georgian* 'covered me' when I represented that county in the General Assembly and the one I love, the *Houston Home Journal*.

Then, there are other community newspapers, outstanding in every respect, that come to mind as examples of the best in community journalism: *The Blackshear Times*, *The Press-Sentinel*, Jesup, *The Northeast Georgian*, Cornelia, and *The Clayton Tribune*.

These papers are the conscience of the community. They report on city and county governments. They help to keep local officials honest and on the right path. And, very importantly, they write the history of the place and people even while it is being made.

Community newspapers are us. They tell our story – the tales of those of us who don't live in Atlanta or New York or even Macon. It's the chronicle record of what we do and are and we aspire to be. And, it's what the world, or this part of it, will know about us when we have long since crossed over the river.

I love our community newspapers. I can't wait to look at mine (I claim some interest in it) when it comes out on Wednesday and then, again, on Saturday. It's been that way ever since I was just a boy, ever since I was able to read and understand.

And, I remember: editors like Cooper Etheridge, Bobby Branch, and Foy Evans, printers like Byron Maxwell, writers like Charlotte Moore ("*Porky*", *we miss you*) and owners like Danny and Julie Evans. Thanks to all of you for enriching my life and making it more enjoyable. And, thanks for making a record, a permanent record, of my little accomplishments in my little part of the world. And, the accomplishments of friends and family.

“Newspapers are in financial trouble.” But, not 'ours.' Not the ones that are close to its readers and know what is really important to its readers – you know things like, a huge tomato, twin calves, a fifty pound watermelon grown by Mr. Gray, the cat caught in the wheel well of the Mayor's car, Mr. William Jones seeing what he believed to be a black panther out on Salem Church Road and the squirrel that interrupted the morning service at the First Baptist Church. What fun. What memories.

I love community newspapers.

Larry Walker has practiced law for 48 years in his hometown of Perry. He served in the General Assembly for 32 years, and now is a member of the University System of Georgia's Board of Regents. His column appears weekly in the Houston Home Journal. His email address is lwalker@whgmlaw.com.