

## *Anecdotes and Essays*

**O**F THE VARIOUS TYPES of column materials, the short narrative article is one of the most effective. In the form of anecdotes, it has a flexibility ranging from the humorous to the fantastic.

While ranking below the expository essay in frequency of use, the brief narrative is an indispensable element of the newspaper personal column. Several of the little stories may fill a day's quota of space. One or two local stories in each issue cause it to be one of the paper's first-read departments. Or a brief story may become the subject of an essay which follows it.

Other reasons for the popularity of the narrative article include:

1. It resembles ordinary conversation; from birth to grave, people tell stories.
2. It involves literary patterns—news, features, etc.—which are most familiar to newspaper writers.
3. Anecdotal material is fairly abundant, especially if readers know that the columnist needs and will print contributed material.
4. Narratives such as are often told columnists can be commented upon with a minimum of preparation

### ANECDOTES

Few columns are composed almost or entirely of anecdotes. Such writing would be a full-time job, and a hard one. But short narrative stories, actual or imaginary, have an important place in newspaper columns. Sharp writers are good story-tellers. They know how to search out anecdotal material and how to elicit it through interviews. Few skills are more important to small-city columnists.

because the writer can draw upon his philosophy, his conversational skills, his imagination, and his basic policies.

5. Reporting local incidents as anecdotes permits a writer more freedom of style and structure than do other forms, such as rhyming verse and humorous paragraphs.

6. Both anecdotes and light essays may be used to further campaigns, point morals, and through subtle or direct exposition build a public understanding of the paper's policies — and without scolding.

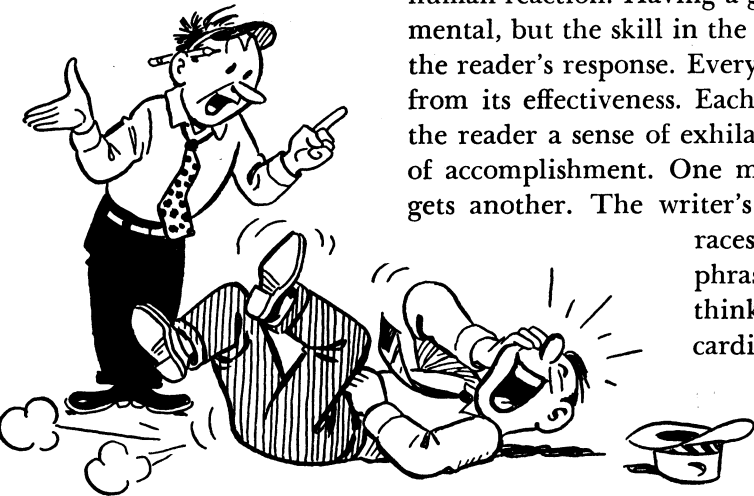
But not everything printed under a standing heading in twelve-pica measure is a "column." Some departments taking this form are filled with news items, announcements, or straight editorials. Dully composed matter presented in this form may be typographically attractive, but it would be inaccurate to call it a column of the kind usually described as "personal."

The column under discussion here is characterized by the previously described light touch. It uses literary forms which follow distinctive patterns. The anecdote is one of these. The effectiveness of the brief narrative story, or yarn, is well understood by traveling salesmen, evangelists, lecturers, and teachers.

An anecdote is a brief, polished narrative. It has a point — creating a laugh, a tear, or some other human reaction. Having a good story to tell is fundamental, but the skill in the telling largely determines the reader's response. Every word adds to or detracts from its effectiveness. Each well-turned phrase gives the reader a sense of exhilaration, the writer a thrill of accomplishment. One moment of inspiration begets another. The writer's mind, like his reader's,

races ahead probing for phrases, discarding bromides, thinking but consciously discarding the obvious.

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As the writer proceeds, he separates significant facts from the trivial and the unusual from the commonplace. He edits sharply, knowing that logical transitions can be supplied by readers, who will derive satisfaction from doing so. He refrains from pointing out obvious conclusions and from making unnecessary explanations, for the same reason.

The parts of a simple anecdote usually are three: (1) The introduction; (2) the details, or build-up; and (3) the climax or conclusion.

This conversation was heard:

"Say, did you hear what happened to Joe Blow?"

"No, what?"

"Well, it seems that Joe was driving out to the corn field the other morning, and . . ."

The yarn continues as the narrative moves chronologically to the climax of the story — Joe's breaking his leg in a freakish manner. The structure of the story is clear:

A—Introduction of the subject and whetting of the hearer's interest.

B—Presentation of details, each of which contributes something to the suspensive effect.

C—The conclusion, which leaves the reader satisfied because he has had his thrill and he now has a story which he can repeat, with such variations as he may contrive in his own version.

The hearer might repeat the story as follows:

"Say, did you know that Joe Blow broke his leg yesterday?"

"No; how?"

"Well, he cracked a whip at a wasp nest, the wasps organized a quick attack, and Joe broke his leg jumping off a wagon. . . ."

This second version, even more than the first, uses the element of surprise, or startling statement. Suspense is sacrificed in the swift statement of the main point of the story. Yet small town folk wish to know

#### RELATE and LOCALIZE

Small-town columnists have no obligation to save the world. But when hometown boys are fighting or serving on distant fronts, many items from the outside have local meanings. Readers crave information which relates outside information to their problems of taxes, wages, style, food, and employment. Columnists at the national and international levels must mention prominent names; local columnists can mention the butcher down the street, the baker, the banker, the farmer. Readers are pleased by local reactions, not by platitudes and generalizations. Therefore, relate and localize. Reflect the result of national decisions through local incidents. Keep the light touch in writing.

**ANALYSIS**

What is a "fairly good" friend? This euphemism has more meaning than meets the eye. Earl Tucker of Thomasville, Ala., heard a colored maid use the term, then developed a full column on it. He included some humor, his personal philosophy, several anecdotes, and a clever ending. The fairly good friend was a first cousin to the better known fair-weather friend. . . . A columnist analyses incidents and picks up the language of the participants. If he has strong feelings on national affairs, he may draw some far-fetched conclusions. Readers appreciate the confining of such P.S. material to brief suggestions. To explain the obvious is to imply that readers are dumb.

everything about a minor tragedy affecting an acquaintance. The narrator continues:

"It seems that Joe was driving over to a corn field at the time and. . . ."

The story is concluded without artifice, ending when the last pertinent fact is given.

Less exciting anecdotes may take a more leisurely, chronological form, using the familiar "Once upon a time. . . ." or "That reminds me of the story of the man who. . . ." In any case, an anecdote must be told so quickly and so interestingly that the reader's interest is held all the way. No tame vocabulary will do. Too many facts will obscure the main narrative thread. Trite phrases will destroy freshness. Concrete words full of imagery must whet the reader's imagination. Good writing demands an easy, flowing style, rhythm, simplicity, and precise placement of emphasis.

The over-all effect may be intimate or reserved, exciting or restrained, slow-paced or abrupt, didactic or quietly narrative. The totality of the effect is to create in the reader the impression which the writer set out to give. For having read the item, the reader will be conscious of having been entertained, warned, praised, or instructed.

In subject matter, anecdotes may be either real or imagined. They are most effective when they concern subjects, people, and incidents which are familiar to readers. They are highly quotable. They are the vehicles of rumor and gossip. Exaggerated, they are known as "whoppers." They often are only "relatively true"; they might or should have been true, or they are true except that the person or locality involved is disguised.

In reporting anecdotes heard in the streets, a columnist must remember that story-tellers habitually "improve" their yarns. But what may be told on Main Street, with grimaces and obvious jest, may

look coldly factual in type. Men who shrug away being the butt of a Rotary Club joke may take offense if the yarn is printed.

Anecdotes which do not concern local people are often composites of persons, times, and happenings. They include parables, fables, and other forms designed to achieve a planned effect. Speakers use them to appeal to the emotions. Propagandists use false anecdotes because of the believability of the narrative story. When readers can identify a fictitious character — of known qualities — with a local person or issue, the power of the anecdote approaches, or may surpass, that of the serious editorial.

The imaginative yarn is perhaps too little used by the columnists. Perhaps we should see more tastefully presented fables after the manner of George Ade or Robert Quillan:

"Once upon a time there lived in a little town three well-known women — Mrs. Bigwig, Mrs. Middle-sized-wig, and Mrs. Smallwig. And it happened that one day . . ."

But profundity is certainly not a requirement of the small-town yarn. Minor comings and goings of citizens evoke chuckles because the readers can supply characterizations and backgrounds. Moreover, columnists gain reputations for having quaint attitudes; their stories are read with a consciousness of the writers. While many items have twists and surprises at the end, others are mere pleasantries in which the endings are "sweet." In any case, local anecdotes are more effective than jokes because they are more plausible and because they represent local people, or types, in action.

We have said that column stories need not be long. Here is an example of brevity from the Corona (Calif.) *Independent*:

Marcia couldn't think of the word for jackknife when she was telling how her grandfather fixed his shoelace.

No one seems to know for sure what people want these days, except that they won't accept a cent less. — Homer King, Hemet (Calif.) News.

Things can be so pure they have no taste or savor. Distilled water is so pure there is little satisfaction in drinking it. Most of us would rather drink out of the creek. Pure gold can not be used. Baser metals must be added. Pure copper has no market. Pure English could not be understood. All of which encourages a person, doesn't it? — Nelson Brown, Mason (Mich.) News.

"He did it," she recounted, "with that little knife which hides itself away."

And, even briefer, is this one from Fred D. Keister's "Round About" column in the Ionia (Mich.) News:

Wife to husband, after several rounds of drinks at a local cocktail party:

"Henry, don't take another cocktail. Your face is already getting blurred."

W. J. McHale of the Chilton (Wis.) *Times-Journal* asked his daughter, 5, what she most enjoyed on a summer day. He said she replied, "Chewing bubble gum, riding my bike, and running and screaming and hollering." McHale commented in his column that while this program probably wasn't conducive to developing her brain or making a perfect lady of her, "we can't think of anything we'd rather have her do."

Simple little stories have a high readership when the characters are locally known. This one is from the Fallon (Nev.) *Standard*:

Shorty Burton and Jimmy Allison were down watching our new lithographic press in operation and were quite fascinated by its smooth operation at 6,000 sheets an hour.

Jimmy leaned over and closely watched the automatic paper feeder air-sucker pick up the sheets and start them on their way to be printed. Finally he straightened up and asked, "What picks those sheets up so fast and accurately?"

Before I could answer his question, Shorty Burton quick-like exclaimed: "Why, Jimmy, dontcha know that? It is the same little man picking 'em up that turns off the light when you close the door of a refrigerator."

Telling stories at the expense of other states or regions is a favored diversion in many columns. A New England spinster was credited with this one in the *Back Bay Ledger* and *Beacon Hill Times* of Boston:

She was struggling with a hot cup of coffee in a small Texas railroad station, trying to gulp it down before

the train pulled out. A cowboy, seated a couple of stools away, noted her plight, and seeing the conductor waving at the woman, came to the fore—

"Here, ma'am, you can take my cup of coffee. It's already sauced and blowed."

Anecdotes and morals have long had a peculiar affinity in the small-town press. The following example is from the Belle Glade (Fla.) *News*:

They tell a story of a chap who found himself alone in a New York hotel on New Year's eve. The lobby teemed with people. Merry-makers thronged the streets. There was gaiety and laughter and a carefree atmosphere on every hand. Lonely and blue, the stranger sat feeling sorry for himself. Finally he could stand it no longer. He decided to do a bit of celebrating even if he had no one but himself for company. Going from tavern to tavern he accumulated a very mellow glow. Life took on a rosy hue. Finally, a few minutes after midnight, he staggered into a swanky hotel lounge. Seeing that he was inebriated, a bouncer took him in charge and escorted him to the street.

Not far away he saw a brilliantly lighted building. Men and women were entering, richly dressed. The place seemed to breathe with a quiet dignity. That was where he belonged. Those were his kind of folks. Making his way to the door, he entered. Looking for the bar, he shuffled down an aisle paying no attention to his surroundings.

Unwittingly he had entered a great cathedral when midnight mass was in progress. Pushing his way to the altar rail he loudly demanded a Scotch and Soda. "Hurry," he shouted, "I want one more drink before the whistles blow; make it snappy, bartender." The priest, seeing his condition, and realizing that the unfortunate man did not know where he was, signalled the choir to march by, singing an anthem.

Unsteadily clinging to the rail, the inebriate stared in amazement for a moment and then, turning to the priest, he cried, "To heck with the floor show; I want a Scotch and Soda."

I do not present this story because of the humor attached to it, but rather because of its pathos and the fact that it seems to typify the spirit of reckless abandon and inability to understand what exists everywhere today. The whole world, it appears, has lost its sense of values and is looking for the answer to its problems in another Scotch and Soda.

Ten years ago I often forgot to lock the office door when I left in the afternoon. Now I'll worry for an hour or two after I get home, wondering if it was locked. Finally I'll get up and go back just to see. Sure enough, I hadn't forgot to lock it. That's one reason why I think my memory is getting better. Not one time have I found it unlocked.—Earl L. Tucker, Thomasville (Ala.) Times.

*Swimming Together* was the title given to an occasion for philosophical observation by Madeline A. Chaffee in the Cranston (R.I.) *Herald*:

The bronzed young man in the swimming trunks knelt on one knee, his eyes on the progress of a small toddler in a bright blue bathing suit coming toward him over the sand.

"Swimming with daddy?" he inquired, as the blond, curly headed little girl made her precarious way from an attractive young woman, apparently her mother, seated on a beach blanket.

Clearly the idea found favor with the miniature bather. Laughing with the delight of a 2-year-old, she reached his outstretched hand.

The man looked over her head at his wife.

"I'll take care of her," he said.

"Of course," she smiled at him. "I'm going to be lazy and sun a while longer. I'll be down."

What an attractive family, we thought, watching from our background vantage point. The thought passed through our mind that happiness is contagious. We smiled just looking at them; they were so obviously glad to be together. He's probably back from the wars, we thought.

The bronzed young man stood up.

With perfect balance he stood there — and we thought for a moment our eyes were playing tricks on us. It couldn't be. It just couldn't.

But it was.

He had but one foot.

The other had been amputated just below the knee, so that, kneeling as he had been, the loss was not apparent. Now, standing, he held the stump close to his good leg so that the effect was somewhat that of the traditional one-legged stance of a crane.

Our immediate reaction was that of sympathy, followed with a tremendous feeling of admiration.

That takes courage, we thought, as he wheeled and started down the beach at a one-legged hop, with no support of any kind, his small daughter toddling at his side.

"He didn't learn that balance overnight," our companion remarked. "That fellow has got what it takes."

"So has his wife," we said, glancing at her as she followed them with her eyes, trusting his independence, as they reached the waves and waded in.

"I'll bet there's a story behind that amputated foot,"

Some of Cupid's shots must have been the result of a wild ricochet. — Douglas Meador, Matador (Tex.) Tribune.



our companion mused as we watched the man lose his balance as a wave hit him, and come up laughing.

We watched as he left the little girl on the beach, watched her scamper back to her mother, turned and hopped back into the water. When it was deep enough he dove and swam, with powerful strokes, into the blueness. Presently his wife joined him and they swam together.

They swam together.

We sat on the sand and watched a Coast Guard cutter offshore, a sail on the horizon, a plane circling overhead, and mused on this business of togetherness.

It's a very satisfactory sort of word: together. With tremendous ramifications. Not only the togetherness of families, but of friends, of races, of nations. It's when we lose our sense of togetherness and go our separate ways that tragedies occur; when we lose sight of fundamentals.

The waves danced up the beach, frill upon frothy frill. The sun shone warmly. Out in the frothy blueness, two heads turned toward shore, where a small girl sat playing in the sand.

It doesn't matter so much, we mused, what happens to us, just as long as we keep swimming.

Together.

An example of building up suspense until the last line is this story from the Laurens (Iowa) *Sun*:

Once upon a time there was a newspaper publisher who was inordinately fond of fishing. In fact, he'd high-tail it out of the office and up the nearby river the moment his paper was out on Thursday.

Came a week end when the moon, water, and bait were just right, and the fish bit so fast and furiously that he couldn't tear himself away from the spot on Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday or Wednesday. But on Thursday he awoke with a start to the enormity of his sin. Here it was press day and not the first lick hit on the paper. Frantically, he threw his tackle into the boat, speedily rowed down the river to town, his mind meanwhile outracing the current.

At the shop his worst fears were confirmed. Judging from the empty bottles lying around, his one printer and general aide had been on his annual spree. And the bookkeeper-reporter, of course, had fled the moment the printer hit the bottle. The publisher glanced at untouched forms from the previous Thursday, then broke down and wept bitterly. Then out of bleak des-

The gossip of small towns is just about the same as that in large cities, but it is more unanimous. — J. E. Sterling, Hugo (Colo.) Eastern Colorado Plainsman.

Things are so confused at present that even four-way cold tablets don't know which way to go.—Gaffney (S. C.) Ledger.

peration flashed a brilliant idea. It took but a moment to set a line of type in 24-point boldface, which he inserted above the head of the front page before trundling the forms to the press: "REPRINTED BY REQUEST."

Probably because the pastime is a favorite of editors, fishing provides many anecdotes for columnists. Here is another one, as recounted by Richard Stanton in his column, "From What I Hear," in the Sussex (N.J.) *Independent*:

A man who discovered the joys of fishing rather late in life became even more insistent than ordinary anglers are upon telling his triumphs to skeptical acquaintances. Enraged by their thinly veiled hints that he was a liar, he bought a special pair of scales, installed them in his library, and made his friends watch while he weighed the fish he caught.

One evening a nervous neighbor (about to be a father) burst in and excitedly sought permission to borrow the scales. He was back in ten minutes, his face flushed with dazed delight.

"Congratulate me," he cried. "I'm the father of a 48-pound baby boy!"

True stories have an especial appeal because they usually have happened to many readers. This one is told by J. C. Peck in the Cazenovia (N.Y.) *Republican*:

Early Sunday morning, the horn on George Tessier's truck, parked in front of his house, short-circuited and started to blow. George, solicitous of the neighbors' sleep, leaped out of bed, scrambled into a few clothes, and tore downstairs. Just as he reached the porch, the blowing stopped. Much relieved, George went back to bed but had hardly pulled the covers up against his chin when the horn let go again. Another race downstairs and this time he made the sidewalk before the horn cut out.

Back to bed again but this time as a precautionary measure he laid out his clothes like a fireman so that if necessity arose he could almost slide into them as he left the bed. It was a good thing he did because, just as he was getting drowsy, the horn started on another rampage. This time it really meant business and George had an audience of interested and much amused neighbors as he frantically cut the wires to the horn.

Disgusted, he decided he was too wide awake to go

War talk starts, so we put longer-lived old folks to making ammunition to shorten younger lives.—El Reno (Okla.) *American*.

back to sleep, so he stayed up and polished the children's shoes.

Equally believable is this story from Mrs. Rosamond B. Hanson's column, "Chat and Comment," in the Manassas (Va.) *Messenger*:

One very warm Friday evening, Sheriff Kerlin peeled off his coat, hung it on the rack in the hotel lobby, and joined his fellow Kiwanians at dinner. Came time to go home, and the sheriff's coat was gone from the rack, badge and all. The sheriff was cagey. He said little, but his eagle eye was on the lookout for the miserable thief who would walk off with the sheriff's own coat. In the meantime, an unsuspecting but innocent sheep went to midweek church services — a sheep in wolf's clothing, so to speak. It was not until just the other day that the Rev. Len Weston discovered that he had two coats, identically the same, hanging in his closet, reminiscent of the days when a fellow could get a two-pant suit. From the pockets of one he extracted a legal summons, a stock sale certificate, and a bottle of nitro-glycerin (tablets, not explosive). It was not long before the sheriff arrived at the parsonage with a fanfare of siren blasts to recover his property from the "thief."

A bit of whimsey now and then is relished by many small-city writers. The following tale is from the "Sand Dunes" column of the Sierra Blanca (Tex.) *News*:

A tourist had been mountain climbing near Sierra Blanca and on his return to the sand dunes and cacti-covered mesas he told me of going above the clouds.

"Yes," said the climber, "I stepped right off the side of the mountain onto a big fleecy cloud and walked for some distance before I really knew my feet no longer were on terra firma."

"Weren't you awfully scared?" I asked.

"Oh, no, not until the clouds began to scatter and left a wide space between the mountain and my cloud," he replied.

"Good heavens!" I gasped. "Did you ride that cloud 2,000 feet to earth without it deteriorating?"

He laughed and said, "No, the cloud drifted over to another peak and I just stepped off."

I was about to nominate him for president of the local Liars Club to succeed me when I looked down and saw pieces of the cloud clinging to his shoes.

A woman can see an old rival's virtues a lot better after both of them have to wear glasses.—  
Raymond Duncan, Ellaville  
(Ga.) *Sun*.

The only time that liquor makes a man go straight is when the road curves.—Everett M. Remsburg, Vista (Calif.) *Press*.

An examination of these and other typical examples of short narrative articles will show the importance of the final statement. In fact, in the composition of an anecdote the final twist frequently is conceived first, then the facts are placed before it. Ability to think up good punch lines is important in many forms of writing. A good line is readily adaptable to verse, essays, cartoon captions, and advertising display. A dramatic situation is lame without a clever summation or characterization. Sharpening of one's ability in narration pays dividends in better writing, better conversation, and in development of a more vivid personality.

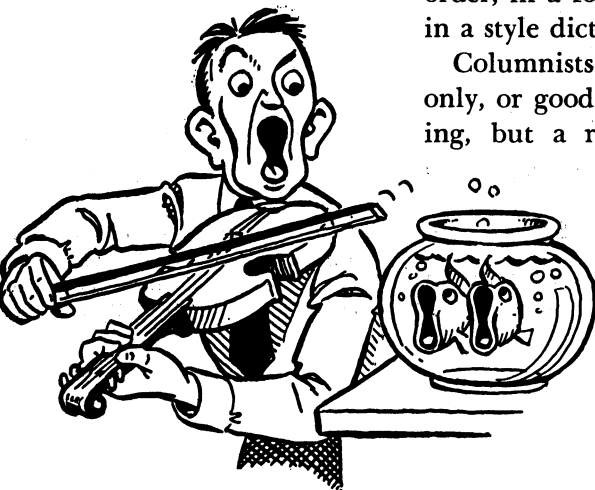
#### THE ESSAY DEMANDS LITERARY POWERS

Most newspaper writing takes the form of some kind of essay—descriptive, expository, argumentative, editorial, biographical, personal, etc. In its very wealth of types, as well as in literary devices, the essay calls forth all the creative ability of a writer. Given an idea and some details, a columnist must still decide what kind of essay he shall attempt, as well as its aim, its mood, and its method.

Everyone writes and talks essays. They are the stuff of diaries, speeches, papers, sermons, and reports to stockholders. They represent facts and ideas passed through a human mind and delivered in some order, in a form and format suited to the need, and in a style dictated by the intended use.

Columnists can succeed if they are good reporters only, or good paragraphers, or are skilled in versifying, but a reputation for being a "good writer" usually implies something more. Versatility in a columnist means that readers never know what to expect. They look forward eagerly to the writer's seemingly spontaneous forays into an endless variety of fields.

... readers never know what to expect.



A first-rate column essayist will venture, not far but gaily and frequently, into discussions of everything from woman-hating to raising of guppies, from observations of nature to the composition of music, from wood-carving to the way of a man with a golf club.

The essay can be as heavy or as light as the columnist desires. For column essays, unlike anecdotes, short stories, and other forms of composition, depend relatively little on organization. Their charm is inherent in the subject matter and in the writer's way of presenting it. Arrangement may be entirely logical or it may be almost formless. Many essays represent merely a columnist's "I think" approach to current local problems. What he thinks is less important than that he entertain and inspire readers with keenness of observation and a flair for interesting combining of words. A simple exposition demands accuracy and understandability. A fanciful essay depends upon flights of the imagination and an ability to associate ideas in unique ways.

Having struck a pose and advertised a point of view, column essayists are found frivolling or philosophizing or sermonizing according to their bent. To set them expounding, merely mention such words as safety pins, debts, peanuts, war, peace, blondes, farming, and traffic. Columnists have well defined ideas on these things. They like to pick up one of these subjects and rattle a typewriter with it. The result is not necessarily good, of course, but much readable material is being produced.

Many of the best column essayists combine the arts of paragraphing and exposition; that is, their essays are studded with epigrams. Their summations are sharp and quotable. Their style is crisp, their methods variously quaint, whimsical, apologetic, exclamatory, gossipy, etc. Everything they see and hear has column possibilities. A visit from grandma will

The kind of beauty that wears best is the kind that grows on one. — Freehold (N. J.) Transcript.

There's not much difference between shutting one's eyes to temptation and a couple of winks. — Jonesville (Louisiana) Booster.

inspire a series of charming light essays, as also will the presence of daughter's roommate from college. A vacation trip by the columnist calls for a report to readers — not a routine one, but the recording of impressions and delights of a person sensitive to the changing scenes.

Letter excerpts from readers to the columnist show a similar technique. The education and life station of the writer is less important than his outlook, which should be distinctive, and his style, which should be interesting. But hometown readers don't object to colloquialisms and occasional banalities if the report "sounds like" the writer. It is also true that many columns are on the borderline of being boresome, saved only by the fact that they deal with local materials. The popularity of a column cannot be estimated, however, in terms only of its technical excellence or presumed importance of subject matter.

But, on the other hand, the influence of a column may not be in direct proportion to its popularity. Beneath his often clownish pose, a columnist craves the respect of his readers. Although his subject matter may seem light, the purposes of the columnist may be quite serious. And periodically he will vary his topics to include critical local issues. He knows that the greatest piece of column material is truth — concrete, unadorned, specific truth. Truth illumines not only affairs at the city hall, the courthouse, and other public places, but the ways of life of citizens generally.

An "inside story" essay grabs top rating for readership. When argumentative, it may be as exciting as a dog fight. The column spotlights a person instead of a corporation or a firm name. This projection of personality will be discussed in a later chapter.

In the column, the writer's mood and spirit may be exploited through subjective reactions to commonplace things. Women as columnists seem to excel at

this sort of thing. Here is an example written by Mrs. Erma Freesman, "The Girl of the Gumbo," in the Manhattan (Kan.) *Tribune-News*:

Immaculate housekeepers never have any thrills. I just know they don't. A car comes down the road; I hold my breath and sure enough it's driving into the lane and my house looks like the devil had been having an auction in it. What do I do? I grab a bath towel and wrap it around my head and wrap a dish towel around the broom and am busy cleaning house right up until they stomp in on the porch. Then I explain I am cleaning house and they'll have to excuse the mess. It works, or anyway I hope it does.

If he shrinks from such first-person writing, the columnist may attribute his feelings to an unnamed person of like profession and problems. Thomas D. Clark includes this description of a southern small-town editor in his book, *The Rural Press and the New South*:

In 1874 an ink-stained Georgia country editor dreamed that he had died and was standing just outside the Pearly Gates when he was greeted from within by a loud, hysterical outcry. This noise came from a group of former subscribers who asked most embarrassing questions in this moment of his entrance upon the celestial life. One wanted to know what the editor had done with the curious egg which he had left in the newspaper office. Another cried, "Where's the piece you promised to write about my new soda fountain?" A familiar voice asked why Old Peddle's new picket fence attracted so much attention while his went unnoticed. Above all this medley of angelic protestation rose the painful demand as to why one outraged soul's name had been misspelled. A female seraph wanted an explanation as to why the account of her wedding had been recorded among the death notices. A David Harum in a southern accent demanded an explanation as to why the editor had written such a sensational story about a runaway scrape in which the reputation of his horse was completely ruined for trading purposes. The village poetess was there, and in a petulant whisper she accused the poor old editor of having botched her verse. A tedious literary companion was most embarrassing of all because he demanded the return of his manuscript. Thus, standing on the very threshold of a glorious eternity, the old Georgian was

If all the cars in America were placed end to end on one long hill, some fool would try to pass them.—Raymond Dun-can, Ellaville (Ga.) Sun.

reminded of many of the reasons for publishing a country paper, and of most of the local editorial sins.<sup>1</sup>

Vivid description is a quality of many of the best columnists. Familiar scenes are described so concretely that readers share the writer's impressions. The following example by Kay Metz is from her column, "Between You and Me," in the *Lamoni (Iowa) Chronicle*:

I like hens. I like the soft crooning off-key song that accompanies their leisurely search for whatever it is they find when scratching in the petunia bed. I like their business, the way they dust themselves in the middle of the road, and, above all, their sensible contentment in motherhood.

I even enjoy their audible pride on having laid an egg, the hen-house gossip as they gather on the roost for the night, and I do not object to the squawking of pretended panic that lady chickens indulge in when startled by a sudden "shool!"

It's nice to watch them dip a wing in the dust, feathers separated like an old-fashioned fan, and then stretch a leg far to the back, just like a danseuse taking warm-up exercises back stage.

But even such an admirer as I will have to admit that the term "dumb cluck" is not an idle phrase when applied to most hens. But dumb or not, our old Dominique biddie once taught this former farm girl an important lesson.

It was a drowsy, quiet day. Just the kind of a day that the click of ice cubes in a tall glass sounds as pleasant and inviting as temple bells. Suddenly the still air was split by a loud, shrill sound from the chicken yard and we be-stirred ourselves enough to rush out and see what was causing the commotion.

There was that disgruntled old Dominique trying to get out of the wire enclosure. The gate was wide open but biddie was so busy scurrying to and fro trying to find a way through the fence that she didn't see the gate or realize that freedom was just at hand.

And so today, when I find myself scurrying around to get things done, working at a frenzy to finish up a lot of little tasks, I remember that foolish old hen and pause long enough to look for an "open gate."

In case of gas attack we are supposed to rush to the attic, and if it's bombs, to the basement. If the enemy begins alternating attacks, war is going to be tough on some of us old short-winded guys. — Selbyville (Del.) *Delmarva News*.

<sup>1</sup> Pages 1-2.



Richard B. Swenson of the Monmouth (Ore.) *Herald* reported a different parable in this manner:

Spading in the garden the other morning, we found a half dozen choice worms and dropped them one by one in a can as a treat for the chickens. The worms were fat and long. One might suspect the hens would divide them out among themselves, taking half a worm apiece.

But when the worms were dropped there was a rush and scramble of wings and heads. One hen got two worms. She swallowed Number One with remarkable rapidity, then grabbed the second and made off with it. The other hens paid no attention to the many worms before them, but pursued the hen which had two worms—just like human beings.

Gaining a little, the hen would halt and swallow an inch of worm but when the pursuers would catch up she was off again. And so on until worm Number Two was fully taken care of, but with the flock in hot pursuit all the time.

Meanwhile, the other fat and long worms stayed in the can, unnoticed.

An awareness of life at its many phases leads columnists into appraisals like this one by Hazel Murphy Sullivan in the Sun Prairie (Wis.) *Star-Countryman*:

There's magic in being 5. At 5 one is old enough to cross streets without holding a grownup's hand, but young enough to snuggle into a parental lap for a bedtime story. At 5 one can be very big and brave and businesslike in carrying out an errand at the grocery store, but very little and loving and sleepy when it's a bit past bedtime. A 5-year-old can live in a gingerbread house and pick tid-bits off the sugar-plum trees, all the time hob-nobbing with the fairies and elves and make-believe folk, and still boast gleefully over a recently acquired mastery of roller skates and zippers and knots that really stay tied.

At 5 one can marry the little boy next door one day and subsequently vow marital allegiance only to her daddy. At 5 one can spank and scold dolls and say grace at the table with equal dexterity. A 5-year-old is still blissfully unaware of the common identity of Santa Claus and Daddy. In a 5-year-old's world there's scarcely an ill that an ice cream cone won't cure.

Five years is the age of decision. Dresses are discarded for blouses and skirts; one cuts her own meat and butters her own bread; one has stridently verbal and voluble

Children speak of God with such intimacy that it sounds almost indecent. — Justin Hammond, Corona (Calif.) *Independent*.

The best security for old age is to be respectful to your children. — Jim Cornwall, Stanton (Neb.) *Register*.

preferences in breakfast foods and hair bows and cousins. The passion for cleanliness involves long sessions in the bathroom, though it rarely includes ears or above the elbows.

At 5 one can still bestow sticky kisses with strict impartiality and sit through a church service without squirming; at 5 one can go to kindergarten and play at lessons. At 5 one is queen of hearts and mistress of all she surveys. It's great to be 5!

Gene V. Davis of the Boonville (Mo.) *Daily News* offers a later version:

So short a time ago I stood upon the curbing, holding tightly to her baby hand, and said firmly, "Don't jerk away, darling. The cars whiz by so fast."

But today, standing on the selfsame curb, she put out a restraining hand to me, and said, "Wait, mother. The light is red." And then with her hand tucked casually within my arm we crossed the street as the signals changed, and I was warmly conscious she was taking care of me.

Long hours she spends brushing her flowing hair into lustrous waves. Daily or twice daily she must have her perfumed bath, her change into spotless clothes. But when I protest shockedly, "Those shoes! Surely you are not going downtown in those shoes!" she looks down at her saddle shoes, grimy, shoddy, and says in mild amazement, "What's the matter with my shoes?"

When we enter stores to choose her fall school clothes, she is still my little girl, barelegged, short and childishly chubby. But when she emerges from the fitting room to parade a new fall costume, she is suddenly no longer my little chrysalis, but a shining butterfly. Her skirts swing smoothly from trim hips, her sweater molds her young girl figure. She moves with grace, with sweet awareness, with a new-found poise — and something clutches my heart.

In quilted robe, curled up in the big arm chair, she thrills away the afternoons with love stories and romances. But with the cool of the evening she is transformed into a hoyden in gaudy shirt and rolled up jeans, kicking the can with the gang, tusseling over balls, sprawling in the grass, climbing trees. And before she goes to bed she must read the latest "traded" comics.

Craving change, she must have a different frock each day, yet the frocks themselves must be just like those of all the other girls lest she feel conspicuous.

Criticism breaks her heart. Love and patience and endless tact are her requisites. She is a shoulder to lean upon in trouble. She is but a weeping child in one's arms. She is April showers and April sunshine. She is fourteen.

A simple little story, with a lead which invites reading without destroying suspense with too much detail, was written about a dog by Darwin Lambert in his "Among Virginia Citizens" column in the Luray (Va.) *Commonwealth Review*:

The man was not even Mickie's master; he simply was a friend. (Mickie is a dog.) It was a hot Saturday night, and partly as a result of some things which happen occasionally on Saturday nights, the man had gone to sleep at the entrance to our lane.

A wooden gate is there and just beyond it the lane slopes abruptly to the State road. En route to town that night, I stopped the car while my father, who was visiting us, opened the gate. My father got back into the car, and I started to drive through the gate.

Mickie suddenly appeared in front of the car, barking. I blew the horn, but the dog refused to get out of the way. I stopped and got out and called Mickie to the side of the lane. The lights of the car shot over the downslope of the lane but lighted the road beyond. It didn't occur to me the first time to look into the shadow.

I got back into the car and started forward again, but Mickie leaped in front of the car, barking furiously and jumping up and down, unwilling to yield an inch. I stopped the car again. My father and I both considered his behavior very queer, and we sat a moment talking about it.

Then I got out and looked carefully in front of the car, and there in the shadow, already too close to the car to be seen from the driver's seat, was the man, sprawled across the lane, asleep. As soon as I went to the man, the dog was content and calm.

Dogs have personality and character, much as do people. They are part of the great pattern of life and by knowing them we inevitably learn more of life.

But not quite as happy was the dog story told by Edward T. Mundy in the Dodgeville (Wis.) *Chronicle*:

The smart man stays a step ahead of those who oppose him and a step behind those who urge him.—Hamlin (W. Va.) *Democrat*.

Many churches have a driveway all around the building these days. That's so Dad doesn't have to back out after delivering the family. — Vic Green, Pekin (Ind.) *Banner*.

Red Evans of this city had been proud of his German police dog. He placed great confidence in the canine and when occasion came to use the animal to guard property he did not hesitate to put him to the test.

Dodgeville has no city sewerage system and the matter of disposal is one for individual solution. Consequently, there are many small buildings of a certain architecture, of course. Hallowe'en pranksters have the rude custom of overturning these edifices, and to guard against such a catastrophe, Red chained his trustworthy animal to the building.

Not a yip or growl did he hear all night, and with the first rays of the rising sun the owner went out to reward the faithful animal. He found the dog, still chained to the building, which, however, was not in its upright position.

If anyone wishes to purchase a police dog at greatly reduced rates, see Red Evans.

A suspenseful chronology about his dog was carried in his "Chatterbox" column by Glen R. Fockele in the Maryville (Mo.) *Tribune*:

My dog Prince was partly responsible for a near catastrophe when he accompanied the Boy Scout troop on a hike. It was in early autumn, and we had taken enough food for the day, planning to return to town late in the afternoon.

But, under the guidance of the Scoutmaster, we had constructed several lean-to's from saplings and leaves, and it seemed a shame not to use them. So we tramped across a cornfield to a farm house, where we found a telephone, and obtained permission of our parents to camp out all night.

It turned right chilly that night, and each lean-to kept a roaring fire going at what was considered a safe distance in front of it. I was wearing an almost new corduroy suit. Prince, of course, was my bed partner, and as the night grew chilly he snuggled closer and closer for warmth.

Suddenly I was dreaming that I had become uncomfortably hot. I awoke to discover the tail of my corduroy suit blazing merrily. Prince had snuggled me right out into the fire.

Small-town people have a strong sense of appreciation for the pioneering of people who preceded them in the community. Many columns are written

in praise of old settlers. The following example is from Douglas Meador's "Trail Dust" column in his Matador (Tex.) *Tribune*:

Worn blankets of gray clouds hung for a long time in the west and rain-sweetened wind twisted them like sails of drifting ships. Riding with an ease born of the saddle, the old man topped a low range of hills and his horse became motionless. He braced himself with a wrinkled blue-veined hand on the saddle horn and studied the landscape. With the battered hat pushed back on his head, he looked at the winding river bed to his left and the music of phantom spurs were ringing in his ears. A few grass-covered trails remained but the mold of memories would not fit the image of reality.

For an instant he wished he had not sought this last visit to a remembered camp ground. He had read the letter from the hospital several times and thought of the white, barren room that awaited him.

He rode on slowly and the strong wind pressed his hat brim upward. The saddle creaked with a comforting sound; laughter of old cowboys seemed to come from the swaying mesquites. At last he found a trace of the wagon road and followed it south to the big flat where roundups were once held, but a taut wire fence blocked his advance. A plowed field covered the memory like a brown tarpaulin. He turned his horse and rode back. The wind was blowing sweet and clean; gray sage nodded to his passing like old friends who remembered him.

Another tribute was written by Mrs. Lucille Ellingwood Morrow of the Collinsville (Okla.) *News* in her column, "Just Thoughts of a Plain Country Woman."

The oldtime cowboy was as hard as nails, loyal to his outfit, quick to flare up, afraid of nothing but walking and a decent woman. There are very few, like old Bud Morris and Bill Ericksten, left. Bud was foreman of what we called our Avant Ranch and was true blue. When the cattle stampeded, Bud rode four days, hatless, rounding up the herd; his head and face were burned to a crisp, but the cattle were all located. Bill Ericksten was a cattle foreman of the home ranch and what Father called a "Prince."

We often wondered how Bud knew when nothing was missing since he could neither read, write, nor count.

A report says that three-fourths of the children of the U. S. are undernourished. Most of them are never home long enough to get a good meal even if their mother were there.—George B. Bowra, Aztec (N. M.) *Independent-Review*.

Residents of little towns are much like tadpoles in a small pool. As they grow, neighbors can see them change. Some become chirpers; some turn out to be pretty; some are fast swimmers; some make a big noise; lots of them just set on the log and blink their eyes. Now and then there will emerge a big fat bullfrog—far too elegant for the little pool of his tadpole days. So he moves on up the creek, and waxes fat on the lazy bugs of other places. Though he has the loudest basso on the bank, he is unhappy. He longs for the days before he shed his tail. So in the middle of the night he crawls out on a log and blows his top for the frogs back home. He hopes they're admiring him; but they're not. For they remember when he wasn't any bigger than they were; and when his croaking is over, they go back to sleep in the little pool. That's life in a small town.—Hugh Park, Van Buren (Ark.) *Press-Argus*.

Came to find out that he carried a lot of fence staples, and at the round-up he dropped one for each animal, into a separate pocket, then took them home for his wife, Doll, to count. So they kept the record true and straight, and never was there a hoof short.

Bud was about six feet one, weighed about two hundred. Doll could walk under his outstretched arm, and weighed about a hundred. He swore eloquently, but used no tobacco or liquor; the worst fault Doll found in him was . . . whittling! It was old Bud who said to his horse, which had somehow caught his hind foot in the stirrup, "Well, if you're goin' to git on, I'm goin' to git off."

I was never a bronc-riding cowgirl and my roping was confined to fence posts, but I knew better than to mount my horse, lean forward, and whisper, "Let's commence," in his ear. If there was any hard riding to do in the round-up, I let the men do it. Once I let two steers get away, and after a hard ride, Bud brought them back and shouted to me, "Sit up close to 'em like the other boys do."

A man's estimate of the fabulous oldtimers was given by Giles L. French of the Moro (Ore.) *Journal*:

When the spirit of any of us ventures beyond this mortal coil something goes out of the life of those who remain. Occasionally such a passing seems definitely to terminate an era, to mark the end of a way of life. To those who knew him, the passing of Dave McKelvey will be one of that kind.

In the days when life was rough and men were tough and each depended on his own fists or his own wits for his place in society, Dave McKelvey was a man among men. He was said to have been as quick and as lithe as a panther and to have a punch in either hand that required no second. Not quarrelsome, but never one to evade an argument or a battle, he went his independent way, letting no one dictate to him about his actions.

There were others of his stripe in those days, men who walked any street confident that they could take care of themselves without benefit of police, the law, the customs, or the manners. No emergency dismayed them, no event nor man could make them fearful. If a rattlesnake bit them they cut out the bite, sucked the wound, tied it up in their shirttail, and went on their journey. If a wagon wheel broke they chopped a few saplings and braced it up with a lasso rope and whatever wire was at hand. If a man wanted to curse and brawl they accommo-

dated him briefly, effectively — and often successfully. They just didn't need any help.

They often lived on the coarsest of food — beans, potatoes, bacon, sometimes seasoned with the fruit of the corn, and despite the prattlings of the nutritionists these old men of another time lived on and on, hale and hearty at seventy, still living and liking it at eighty, and turning to the ministrations of women and man-made comforts only as grey hair and ninety approached.

Their stories were filled with direct action; of man against man, of man against nature. There were always tales of men who had to place reliance on nothing outside themselves. They had but one life and they lived it, and the rest of the world could be damned.

In these effete times beds have sheets on them instead of being wooley, unwashed blankets covered with canvas; men work an eight-hour day instead of until the finish of a job; a man can hardly take a drink of whiskey without some woman putting water in it; there's a bathtub in nearly every house and the rough old days are history.

Life is softer, but not fairer; quieter, but not kinder; easier, but less stimulating.

Fern Lee of the *Towner (N. D.) Press* completed the picture in this short item:

Speaking of cattle ranches, how times have changed. In olden days people expected a rancher to be a sort of tough appearing, grizzled, bewhiskered man with a six-shooter on each hip. Consider the difference in that picture and that of the man from Kansas, who with his \$17,000 plane arrived in a few hours to attend the Schultz sale. He coolly laid out \$7,600 for one animal and \$3,700 for another and then returned to Kansas for supper.

Small-town editors have to balance news coverage and policies between town and country, a task now quite complicated because farmers are maintaining houses in town and townspeople are buying farms.

... balance between town and country is now quite complicated ...



The economy of the smaller towns rests on agriculture, and the editor won't forget the fact. If he has had a rural background himself, he isn't likely to let the readers forget it. If he is a town man, and if he has a columnist who speaks the language of R.F.D., he will happily print material which rings true to out-in-country readers.

The authors, having boyhood acquaintance with the subject matter, liked this discourse on threshing time, written by Hazel Murphy Sullivan of the Sun Prairie (Wis.) *Star Countryman*:

Threshing time, like the old gray mare, "ain't what she used to be," but it is still enough like it to make an interesting study in contrasts and similarities.

My mental image of the oldtime threshing day is a hodge-podge of bearded men in overalls with red bandanas tied around their bronzed throats; air charged with excitement and thick with chaff and smoke; strident noises which sent the mother cat scuttling out of the granary in three rapidly repeated trips, each time with a baby kitten held tightly by the nape of the neck; red hot coals in the firebed of the snorting, chugging engine, while the blue-eyed fireman, black as the smoke which bellied out of the smokestack, sweated out his day; neighbors' wagons parked at noon all over my mother's carefully kept front lawn; wash basins and towels placed on orange crates outside in the rear of the house; much good-natured bantering, jocular and often a bit on the ribald side; stampedes to be first to the table, and the seemingly endless supplies of roasted meat, heaping bowls of mashed potatoes and the accompanying gravy, the cole slaw, pickles, pies, and doughnuts. . . .

The members of the young fry at our house were stationed outside the screen door wielding broomsticks to which strips of old shades had been tacked. It was our business to see that the men got in and the flies stayed out. Often it was a draw.

Newspaper readers appreciate columns which deal with farm scenes in whimsical style, for these little essays echo popular attitudes. An old saying, "You can lead a horse to water, etc." suggested to the late O. E. Bramson of the Dunlap (Iowa) *Reporter* a

The best check-writing machine was made from a rib. — Welch (Okla.) *Watchman*.



better version of the old wheeze. He addressed the following to "My Dear City Cousin":

Until you have tried explaining to a week-old calf the secret of swallowing up hill from the bottom of a pail, your education has been neglected. There is nothing to which this business of smartening up a baby bovine can be compared, and there are no books on the subject. The whole thing is strictly between you and the calf — and may the better man win.

Now it happens that calves, like people, rats, and kangaroos, are born with instincts. From the moment they utter their first baby bawl, they know through instinct that breakfast, lunch, and dinner are up in the air in a hammock that mama has — a hammock that looks like a cross between a Scotch bag pipe and a four-legged stool. The calf never has been told about this free soda fountain — this lacteal tap. He knows about it, that's all. He raises his head and roots around, pretty soon connects, and goes after it in earnest. This is instinct in the raw.

In the first few days of their lives calves develop a will of their own. At times I have thought a calf was fifty per cent instinct and fifty per cent temper. If I didn't shudder at such puns, I might go so far as to say a calf is just plain bull-headed.

When a mamma cow's milk is ready for back porch delivery, and the baby must be weaned, you put about five fingers of warm milk in a bucket and walk into a stall where the calf is already demanding in loud bawls that his source of foodstuff come back.

First off the bat, the calf wants nothing to do with you. He wants mamma; and no matter how you look, you still don't look like his mamma. You get one arm around the calf's neck, and you hold the milk bucket in the other hand.

"Nice calfie; put your head down."

But he doesn't put his head down, so you gently but firmly press his head down to sort of assist him like. This is when the nice calfie gives a mighty lunge and sends the bucket skyward with his nose.

You retrieve the empty bucket and get more milk and return to the scene of action. You wet your fingers with milk and stick them in the calf's mouth. This makes him happy. Again, with the same results. But just as his nose is about to touch the milk he remembers his instincts and rears his head.

Same thing over.

You repeat the whole process a dozen times. He fol-

Tomorrow is wonderful, for it releases today. So today I can forget all the unpleasant things in the past, forgive others and myself for errors, clear from my thoughts all belief in defeat, and wait quietly and serenely for the leads that will direct me into worthwhile achievement. I can do this because there is always tomorrow when I can return to worrying, to regrets, bickering, and fears — if I choose. — Clarke Sanford, Margaretville (N. Y.) News.

The experts say we should not upset the child when we correct him, but it's difficult otherwise to reach that part of him we work on.—Willow City (N. D.) Times.

lows the finger down, down and finally you get his dear little nose in the milk. Hooray, he drinks! You take your finger away; the calf rears his head. Same routine all over again, and again.

Well, to make a long story short, after three or four thousand times, civilization overcomes instinct and the calf knows how to drink uphill. Then he not only wants to hurl his whole body into the milk bucket, but insists on chewing the handle off, too.

Lead a horse to drink? That's a laugh. Give me a horse any day — you take the calf.

What a country editor thinks of his farmer friends was neatly told by Matt Vernon in the New Iberia (La.) *Iberian*:

There never has been anything wrong with farming that a few profitable crops wouldn't cure. It has always been the most satisfactory existence of all the trades and professions. The dividends in good living, independence, outdoor work, and the enjoyment of association with Nature and growing things put it high up on the list of desirable occupations. The good farmer is seldom lazy, yet can find time for recreation. . . . And he has the means for full enjoyment of his leisure time. His shotgun is always handy, his fishing pole and bait convenient, and the field and stream lie just over the way.

The good farmer is also a good businessman; he has to be. Once upon a time we wrote something about farmers, and we want to reproduce it here today. Keep in mind that this was written by a country boy who knows both sides of farm life — one who has lived in both country and city, yet prefers the rural life. We called it "The Farmer's Creed," and wrote it for a farm celebration held in June, 1943, in Mississippi.

I am the farmer.

I live by hard work and the sweat of my brow.

I work in the sun and the rain and my hours are long and my duties unending.

I seek not fame nor fortune but my life is one of little things, humdrum to the city man, full of drudgery, but rich in contentment and peace.

I am the first stop on the production line of mankind for I start the raw materials of food, fiber, and timber down the channels of trade to feed, clothe, and shelter the people of the world.

I am an idealist who will not sacrifice my freedom and independence for a weekly pay check, but value my way of life above all, no matter what the cost in toil or sweat or sacrifice.

I plow my own row, keep my own time, vote my own ticket, choose my own company, burn my own fuel, raise my own feed and food; I am Freedom's child and her most ardent champion.

I am a home builder and a family man and my children give life and leadership to the nation, for they know the meaning of work as the real purpose in life, a reason for being as certain as the processes of nature itself.

I am a God fearing man and a believer in the church, for under God's supervision I have charge of the beasts of the field, the soil I tend, and the plants I bring to fruition, and through His teachings I learn my responsibilities and duty and in His inspiration I find my solace and strength.

I am a specialist in an intricate profession with skill and knowledge acquired only through years of planting, cultivating, and harvesting, through producing and marketing, through butchering and building, through blacksmithing and animal husbandry and many other trades.

I am the foundation of civilization and its hope for the future, for neglect of my way of life is the most certain sign of decadence in any race or nation.

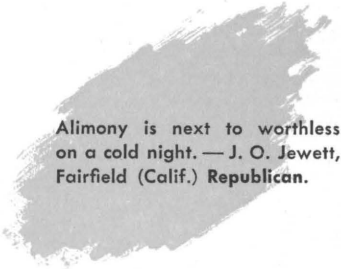
I am the farmer.

Town people live close to nature, and their columnists are moved by the changing seasons — inspired to flights of description and appreciation:

October is a month that puts a new drive in my heart. Its nippy mornings, air filled with a bracing effect, lift me up and make me look forward to nice cool days laden with hours of warm, comfortable sunshine. Not the hot, sweaty days of summer that make me gasp for a decent breath of air — but balmy days that cause me to say, "God, I'm glad I'm livin'."

Yes, indeed — October, the great invisible hinge on which the door of summer closes and the door of autumn opens. The October that creeps into our midst on the hazy edge of summer's lazy air that is drifting away like a gentle lamb running across hilly pastures. . . . away . . . far away. The October when patches of crystal white frost deck the lawns and fields . . . when gay flirty banners of smoke break the early morning blue or the evening's golden sunset as they merrily chase themselves up from the chimneys of houses . . . houses that then seem to be so clustered that you like to think they are embracing each other to ward off the sting of a snappy morning.

—Tol Solinski, "Impressions One Gets,"  
Salem (Ind.) *Republican-Leader*.



Alimony is next to worthless  
on a cold night. — J. O. Jewett,  
Fairfield (Calif.) *Republican*.

October always baffles us. It's death in the midst of life; it's a door closing, and corridors opening; it's dead fields, with living harvests to produce death and then life again; it's a ball game reeking verse and din, tumult and laughter, and life at its highest, while all around the dead leaves, the trees, the birds — all animal and vegetable life — are at farewells; it's a school bell, a funeral knell; it's the end, it's the beginning.

—Jean Olson, "But Incidentally,"  
Story City (Iowa) *Herald*.

Tongue-in-cheek essays, half in jest and partly serious, and sometimes ornamented with extravagant phrasing, have long been standard column items. Whether they stem from popular attitudes or help to create these may be debatable. But many waggish writers delight in veiling their ideas in verbal spinach, implausible tales, and clownish comment.

The following tidbit from the Belton (Tex.) *Journal* probably was inspired by advertising claims for cold remedies:

In the good old days when you wanted a horse to stand still, you tied him to a hitching post. Today you place a bet on him. — Bells (Tenn.) *Sentinel*.

People in Belton are now divided into two classes: who have just recovered from a cold, and those who now have one. The Research Department of the *Journal*, staffed by eminent medical authorities and a smallish man with a protruding Adam's apple that twitches when he is thinking, has concluded that colds can be prevented by proper diet. One quart of llama milk upon arising, followed by a dozen mockingbird eggs is recommended. Later in the day, one should eat plenty of gnats' livers, together with second-joints (only the left ones, mind you) of young female pheasants, fried in butter. In case this diet cannot be followed — for butter is hard to find — a cold can be cured by drinking a mixture of lysol, mercuric acid, buttermilk, and Temple (Tex.) water. We tried this on a friend and he didn't sniffle again — he just lay there, looking so natural.

Advice to a town fretting over the lack of direct rail and highway connections was written in somewhat the same spirit by T. A. Lally in his column, "A Voice in the Wilderness," in the Bridgeport (Neb.) *News-Blade*:

A recent press dispatch records that Hartington (pop. 1700), county seat of Cedar County, Nebraska, decries the lack of a direct highway or rail connection with Omaha. And not only that, but the lack of direct transportation with any place. It sits on a spur railroad and a secondary highway.

Now, it seems, the people of Hartington are after something. They aren't quite sure up there what it is, but it sounds like they want a few trans-continental trains zipping through town, at least a couple of paved highways with buses and everything, and maybe two Mainliner air flights a day.

Well, listen, Hartington. Don't do it.

You may feel that the world is now passing you by. But the shape the world is in today, you're not missing a thing. Your town, in the press dispatch, is quoted as "making progress" in spite of its isolation.

We'll bet it's making progress (whatever that is) without help from the outside world. Keep up a good school system, support your churches, subscribe to your local newspaper, surface your streets, teach your kids to blow their noses and to say "thank you" and "please" and "sir" as the occasion warrants, give them jobs to do instead of letting them parade the streets at midnight, jail your speeders before they reduce the population to 1699 or 1698, throw your drunks in the clink instead of letting them run loose insulting women and scaring children, stir up a batch of taffy for that Saturday night shindig after the movies, hold a weekly bubble gum contest, and take the car keys away from the kids.

You may feel out of it now, but believe us, brother, your day is coming.

Philosophizing in a homespun manner has made H. B. Fox of Taylor, Tex., a dirt farmer and sometime editor, one of the most widely quoted columnists in his region. The following example of his work is from the Carrizo Springs (Tex.) *Javelin*:

Dear editar: Last week I was writin you about a outfit that's worryin over how the farmer is gonna spend his "surplus" money, which is like worryin over a hole in your raincoat during the worst drought on record, and now I've discovered another group of thinkers which is worried over the problem of plenty.

Accordin to these thinkers, science with the help of atomic energy and a few other things is liable to stumble on a method of makin food out of thin air, without the

I feel very unworthy when my cocker spaniel sits on the floor and gazes at me like I am God. It takes a lot to live up to what a dog thinks of his master. According to him I can do nothing wrong, I am noble, kind, a defender of the weak, a good provider and he trusts my judgment. Sometimes people think dogs are a nuisance, and that in this day when food is expensive they are an unnecessary expense. But mine is worth his salt if he only reminds me occasionally, when I need it, that there still is left in the world such real true attributes as friendliness, constancy, trustworthiness, love and loyalty. — Laura M. Klinefelter, Adams (Wis.) Times.

The trouble with depressions is they come at such inconvenient times — when everybody is out of work. — Orin Taylor, Archbold (Ohio) Buckeye.

trouble of plantin and cultivatin and raising cattle, and they're afraid if everybody got enough food for nothin it would demoralize things.

Bein somethin of a pioneer, I been experimenten with just such a problem for some time; that is, I've tried livin without doin much plantin or cultivatin, and I ain't found it demoralizin, although some folks would differ with me on what demorilizin is. Also, I have noticed that farmers with smokehouses full of meat and cellars full of canned goods and potatoes, enough to run em a year more, ain't demoralized by havin all they want to eat. And also, the millionaires I read about, with enough money to feed themselves the rest of their lives without hittin a lick, still don't seem to be disturbed, and I ain't heard of a one frettin about his situation and wantin to go broke so he could be happy again.

If you ask me, some folks is hard-pressed to find something to worry about. I say let em come out here and worry about somethin practical — how to keep a cow in a pasture that ain't been rained on in eight months, with a two-wire fence; or how to keep a woodbox full when there's newspapers to read; how to draw water from a dry well; how to make four bales of Johnson grass hay last all winter; how to patch a roof that's got holes in the patches you put on last year; etc.

However, if the people who spend their time worryin about what'll happen to folks if they don't have to worry about anything, could find out how little time I worry about anything, they'd have something to worry about. And if you're worried about the money for my subscription to your paper, you got a right to be.

Examples of essays which have been expanded to full column length will be found in the Appendix.