One delightful aspect of the small-town newspaper column is its endless variety. Below are listed some of the ideas which appear in such columns.

Keeping in mind various formulas and devices is a stimulus to inspiration. Furthermore, repeated use of a device brings readers back to a column regularly. Circulation is stabilized by such continuing features.

A good idea may have a universality which commends it to writers of columns everywhere. Adaptations to local conditions make other devices usable.

Many columnists have found these worth giving readers:

1. Departments. Some writers classify materials by divisions or labels. Examples:
   - Edge-of-the-seat department.
   - Room-for-research department. (Did bridge drive men to golf or did golf drive women to bridge?)
   - Minor disaster of the week.
   - Man of the week.
   - This week's orchid for public service.
   - The week's bonehead award.

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Today's wacky definition.
There-ought-to-be-a-law department.

2. *Characters.* Many columnists put words in the mouths of fictitious characters. These include well-known types—an unnamed grouch from a certain part of town, a stenographer, an old bachelor, Teen-age Tessie, etc. Also noted are the Office Cat, the Boss Rat in Jones Alley, and the Broadway Mocking Bird. These characters speak not only from their animal perspective but also from man's viewpoints.

3. *Items Overheard.* Facts are sometimes handled as rumors, and nameless persons are heard to comment on affairs of current interest. Also, actual remarks picked up in a crowd may be interesting although fragmentary. A few writers have planted wire-recorders in gossipy meetings with hilarious results. Speakers usually are not identified.

4. *Contributors.* While few small-town columns show a steady flow of readers' contributions, the opinions of local people on current issues are valued. Sharing column space with friends and readers seems almost an obligation. Quoting well-known local people makes a column seem alive. Acceptability of readers' verse and essays is a more debatable question. Some columnists turn down all verse rather than reject most of it.

5. *Philosophy.* Manners and morals are standard column subjects. Writers try through precepts, proverbs, parables, and paragraphs to voice the philosophy needed by their generation. In time a columnist builds into a recognizable pattern the ideas and convictions by which he lives. The more skilled he is as a writer, the
Guessing games are not for radio listeners only. Some columnists are describing well-known local people and their work. The first five persons who phone in correct identifications are mentioned. Sometimes theater tickets are given as prizes. Every community has its "sharks" in arithmetic or spelling. Columnists who challenge these find ready-made reader interest.

In the following example, Lynn Landrum of the Dallas News satirizes the tendency of institutions of higher learning to ignore certain fundamentals while worrying about others:

Episcobapterian University, founded in 1950 by the Evangelical Reformed Episcobapterian Church South of God (Unigational Synod), is having trouble. Opposition has come up against the official policy of the university on bubblegum on the campus. School authorities have ruled against the gum. Throughout this fair land of ours the young men and women of our choicest families are everywhere upset by the temptations and enticements of commercialized indulgence. Besides, some imp of Halifax went out and parked his gum in the internal workings of the check-signing machine and all the salary checks for May are not out yet. Moreover, Episcobapterian faculty people have come out for bubble gum liberalism. They say self-expression must not be circumscribed. They say that the psychological id of the norm must not be regimented by the reflex ratio of the idem sonans. They hint that crackerdemic freedom is involved. It is true that an academician might become the more firmly attached to his seat of learning, but it is hard to see how bubblegum enhances tenure. But it looks like concessions will have to be made if next year's football schedule is to be met successfully.

6. Part for a Whole. Emotional values in cold statistics can be made more apparent by pointing out localized effects, even on a single individual. The average man comparison has grown stale, but columnists find it effective to describe an event through the mind and heart of a child, a blind person benefited by a civic club minstrel, or a bond issue as seen by a laborer. It is perhaps remembered that the New York Times' "Hundred Neediest Cases" is still a good publicity device.

7. Teen-Age Talk. Juvenile delinquency is, more than is generally recognized, a failure to understand and influence the adolescent mind. Yet every parent
knows that teen-agers have sound ideas about parks, playgrounds, traffic, and other local issues. Instead of imposing early curfews and other restrictive measures, some communities put their youngsters on civic committees and challenge them to help build sound public programs. No alert columnist will wish to be without some quotations from his future subscribers.

8. *Wisdom of the Ages*. Put the same question to persons 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, and 70 years of age. The variations in viewpoints will be amusing, and possibly enlightening. What columnists write about depends much upon their ages. Here is a pertinent item from the Fountain Inn (S.C.) *Tribune*:

**THIS IS LIFE**

At five the youngster says: "The stork brought us a new baby."
At ten: "My dad can lick any man twice his size."
At fifteen: "Girls are — blah!"
At twenty: "Just give me a chance. I'll show 'em."
At twenty-five: "The system is all wrong; there should be reform."
At thirty: "In a few years people will wake up and demand their rights."
At thirty-five: "I'd be rich if I'd stayed single."
At forty: "Give me another, and a larger bottle of that cure-all tonic."
At forty-five: "I'm sick of reformers."
At fifty: "Thank God I've got a good comfortable bed to sleep in."
At sixty: "I was mighty lucky to pick such a fine woman for a wife."
At sixty-five: "I feel as young as I did at twenty-five."
At seventy: "I don't know what these modern young people are coming to."

9. *The Weather*. People are so subject to variations of the weather that they never cease to talk about it. Columnists who neglect it do so at a sacrifice in reader interest. Weather history is interesting, especially as it concerns extremes. Forecasting the weather is popular. Readers help by reporting the thickness of fur on animals, bark on trees, moss in the pond, etc.
10. **Old Sayings.** From the pig in a poke to a cock crowing before a door, people have interpreted life in stories and idioms which make up a region's folklore. The American language is dynamic, colorful, growing. Rather than hamstringing it with rules, columnists are recording it in folk tales, brief quotations, and light essays. Some writers run a few old sayings each week and ask readers to send in others.

11. **Folk Tales.** Every region has its legends, haunted houses, and Indian tales. There are stories about people and about things, about plants and animals and about lakes and streams. After exploiting the better known stories, columnists can try for others which will be lost unless the old folks recall and record them. Local newspaper men often regard themselves as historians. It is a wholesome attitude.

12. **Apologies.** Corrections and retractions usually are run in news columns, but minor apologies appear in many columns. A variation ran in the "Etaoin" column of the Somerset (N.J.) Gazette:

A very nice lady just called in and scolded hard about a story we had promised to use. She demanded to know why it wasn't printed. She was hopping mad. We told her to look right smack in the middle of Page 4 and there she'd find the story. She thereupon apologized and said she must have read too fast. She felt very silly. Little incidents like that make us chortle with unholy glee. We don't often get a chance to have fun. We're mostly wrong.

The lady mentioned probably doesn't exist, but the item will make readers look over their papers carefully before calling the editor to complain. On the contrary, a columnist on the Ripon (Wis.) Commonwealth had to eat his words:

The paper (chomp, chomp) isn't so bad, (chomp) but the words . . . ugh!

These were the Commonwealth sports editor's feelings this week as he proceeded to eat the words in which he proclaimed that "there ain't no such animal" as a divided
season in the Central State League. The sports editor was misinformed.

13. **Brevitorials.** Although columns have replaced many formal editorials, some publishers retain both forms and find them complementary, not competitive. Nevertheless, terse little editorials are found in columns, and these are sometimes called brevitorials. One paragraph is usually enough for such terse comment.

14. **What To Read.** As an advocate of the printed word, a columnist can afford the time it takes to write short reviews of significant new books and magazine articles. He can establish the idea that it is pleasant to browse in the public library. He can broaden the base of his column by quoting from what he reads. He can quote friends who have read other material. He suggests that reading is fun and he backs his argument with examples. It would do his business no good to give the impression that he spends his evenings listening to Amos and Andy *et al.*

15. **Promotions.** Readers like action and appreciate success. Many columnists try to have some campaign or promotion going all the time, and they share leadership in many local projects.

16. **Half-Minute Interviews.** Under this classification a columnist can introduce newcomers, give brief biographies of new club presidents, mention advertisers just back from market, and quote students home from college. Quotes are good, whether from beggars, tourists, or prize-winning steers, real or make-believe.

17. **Seen.** Under this heading the columnist’s eyes make their contribution. Perhaps he drives over the country on Sunday afternoon. It’s safer to see things than some people in some places.

18. **Heard.** This heading is for items heard and overheard — children playing, frogs croaking, a new

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A disadvantage of living in a small town is that when your cat gets too high in a tree you have to get it down yourself.—Merrill Chilcote, Maryville (Mo.) Tribune.
father boasting, brakes screeching, firecrackers exploding, dinner pails rattling.

19. *This ’n That.* Things which deserve only a sentence each can be bunched in a single paragraph and separated . . . like this.


21. *Family Names.* Check old county records for family names on original documents. Write up the old families and how they came to the county. Similarly, farms and firms bearing old names may be subjects for one-topic columns, which really are feature stories. Shorter material may be used on origins of family names.

22. *Old Subscribers.* "While renewing his subscription for the nineteenth straight time, John Blank told us that . . . ." The suggestion here is that people like and read the paper, but the item may be expanded on its general merits.

23. *Letters.* Communications from readers which are too hot to handle in letters-to-the-editor departments may be run in personal columns, where analysis and comment are easy and pruning of the contributions may be explained. Usable, too, are letters from former residents and reports from local people on trips. Some columnists share their thoughts and findings as they open a typical day's mail.

24. *Gripes.* Editors, like readers, like to complain. Here is an excerpt from the Laurens (Iowa) Sun which has a universal application:

Where our subscribers are concerned, we like to feel that the Sun is THEIR paper; and we'd like the privilege of being first with such news. It doesn't matter one
Sota to the city papers if we have it first, but it kinda knocks the frosting off our cake when we read it in them first. . . . We'd like to make a desperate plea to all couples intent on committing matrimony, particularly to the brides-to-be and their mothers, to see that the details are written up in advance or immediately afterward, and gotten to us.

25. Unusual Signs. One paper, noting that an excavating company advertised that it “would go anywhere to dig up dirt,” started printing other unusual signs. It also noted the frequency of misspelled words and the strange lettering of amateur calligraphers. Encyclopedias and advertising texts gave interesting historical data on signs.

26. Phone Calls. Errors made through misconstrued telephone calls would fill a joke book. A phoned-in ad offered for sale “two used sheets”; it should have read “two ewe sheep.” Ask readers to tell of other telephone blunders. Interview a telephone operator. Do a bit of research on telephone etiquette. Study local telephone voices. Offer a modest prize for the local secretary having the most gracious telephone manners.

27. Close Calls. The home is a dangerous place. Calling attention to some of the hazards may prevent accidents. Shooting at shadows, climbing on old ladders, going alone into old wells, filling a house with extension cords—these are settings for tragedy. But there are many other hazards likely overlooked. Call on readers to furnish examples of queer accidents in the home. Look through fire records to find causes of home blazes.

28. Then and Now. Nostalgia quickly palls, but there is no harm in noting these changing times. Many farms, for example, have no draft animals; some have no pigs, chickens, or ducks. Many farms have no cows. And it has come to pass that some farmers’ sons cannot tell what a well-dressed horse

Editorials are something of a tradition in the newspaper world. They’re like the buttons on the sleeve of your coat—they serve no particular purpose but for some reason they are supposed to be there. The presence of an editorial column, convention speakers say, gives the newspaper a certain tone and prestige, which may be true, but it’s hard to put one’s finger on the values. Such claims must be accepted in blind faith and sublime hope.

The easy—and maybe the best—way to do an editorial column is to buy the stuff already written. We can buy it by the ream, turned out by top-flight writers who by their abilities have crashed the syndicates. You would thus read better editorials and know what the bigger minds are thinking about, but there is one thing those fellows can’t provide—that’s the local angle, the home-town atmosphere. If the local newspaper is to live and move and have its being at the grassroots, we think it should try to express that viewpoint.—Ralph Shannon, Washington (Iowa) Journal.
should wear. Make up a list of parts—reins, bits, suspenders, hobbles, knee boots, head poles, etc.—and test your theory that farms are not what they used to be. Ask a hardware man to compare his stocks of today and 25 years ago.

29. Scrapbooks. Some columns are carrying items labeled “For your scrapbook.” These include verse, recipes, puzzles, odd news, tributes to this and that, and regional folk tales. Of course, recipes are worth separate attention. Readers will enjoy a run of recipes for sauces, chili, scrapple, chigger ointment, stomach bitters, and snakebite remedy.

30. Pet Peeves. Unlike gripes, which are ill-tempered, peeves may be humorous, good humored, comical, etc. Consult garbage collectors, night watchmen, park attendants, delivery men, and steeplejacks. Talk to ministers about their many strange experiences in times of crisis, death, marriage, and divorce.

31. Finding Lost Articles. Very real is the gratitude of a person for whom a columnist has found a lost pet or purse. Some columns run free mention of such losses. Sometimes a small reward is offered by the paper. Free mention may be limited to lost pets so as not to detract from the classified ads.

32. Gratitude. Readers, too, do things for others. Each community has persons who are quick to give flowers, food, and attention to the sick. They would likely be embarrassed by publicity, but a columnist can praise the spirit which prompts such unselfish service. Sometimes an elderly individual can be singled out for praise, or some honor can be arranged, presented, and reported.

33. Eccentricities. People are funny, and should not be ashamed to admit the fact. Some have long unfulfilled desires, such as the eating of ice cream and cake before the main course at luncheons. Mention this, and old Mrs. Jones, who supervises Methodist ladies who serve the Rotary Club each week,
will see to it that the queer one gets his dessert first. Once started, confessions of odd desires may become epidemic. Drop the subject while readers are still talking about it.

34. Habits. People like to occupy the same pews in church each week. Children are broken up even by a move across town. Old folks are site bound. Not everyone likes a new house, a new pair of shoes, new golf clubs. Not everything that is new and shiny makes for happiness and comfort. Columnists write much about the habits of people — and themselves.

35. Tours. Outlining of Sunday afternoon tours, logged by miles and stops and things to do and see, not only please many readers but also develop possibilities for advertising. A columnist on tour is able to mention accommodations both good and bad — within the limits of the libel laws.

36. Allergies. Not many years have passed since people with peculiar tastes and reactions were considered offensive. Tolerance of people whose only abnormality is a different physical reaction to their environment is not marked in some communities. And some physicians have harsh words for parents who force children to eat things they don't like and wear clothes they don't want. Columnists note these differences, and also comment on the effect of wallpaper tones, noise, tight places, altitude, and other phenomena.

37. Public Figures. The average reader is interested in the personal life and habits of persons known to him through news articles. Columnists describe the mayor's desk, his trophies, his golf score. They note how firemen use their leisure. They tell of school teachers who open hour quizzes with prayer, others who serve tea midway of final exams, and of professors who can never remember where they parked their cars.

38. Special Days. Unimaginative columnists say

Grandparents think kids are wonderful because their perspective is better than the parents'. — Helper (Utah) Journal.
how to write columns

One thing that a newspaper­man learns quickly is that it is impossible to satisfy everyone. If the day ever comes when everyone is satisfied there won’t be any newspapers. There would be no reader in­terest if all subscribers were completely uncritical. When either a brick or bouquet is tossed at a newspaper­man he is flattered. He knows that his product is being read. — Paul Bumbarger, Charles City (Iowa) Press.

39. Mistakes. Pointing out errors in bigger papers may be a mistake, but many columnists indulge in it. Textbooks, which tend to be based on other textbooks, may be astonishingly inaccurate. Check the geographies used in the public schools. What do they say about the region in which the children live? Encyclopedias aren’t perfect, either. What is hominy? Ask your grandmother, then see if her definition agrees with a dictionary. It may be a good idea to explain why newspapers are not, and economically can never be typographically perfect.

40. Classified Ads. This lively section is unexcelled for reader interest. But many ads leave readers curious. Wholly apart from promoting the section, columnists can find many little features by telephoning advertisers.

41. Conversation. To what extent does conversation waste time while stupid questions are answered? Are you offended when you get a complete answer to the question, “How are you?” How does barbershop conversation differ by seasons? To what extent do people agree with others while secretly believing the opposite? What is a “brilliant conversationalist?”

42. Reactions. Not all the good actors are in Hollywood. How should people act when they have heard a joke before? When they get bad news? When they get wonderful news? Why do people laugh? Should back-slapping be discouraged? What is the best way to break shockingly bad news? How should one reply to a compliment which isn’t deserved, or even to one that is?
... a complete answer to the question, "How are you?"
43. Reviews. Movies take a lot of time, but columnists can salvage some of it by commenting on the shows. Exhibitors' press books have data on stars and on problems encountered during production.... Columnists can dig out unusual facts in interviews, at dress rehearsals, and by consulting technical staffs. What other writers overlook, columnists can report. This often is the most interesting part of a show or event.

44. Success. How to get that first job is the serious problem of many high school and college graduates. Some guidance, and much news interest, may be found in the stories of how local business men got their start in life.... And many young people need advice on how to apply for a job. One business man reported this phone call from a high school graduate: "Hey, you got any jobs open down there now?"

45. Procrastination. Having confessed that he habitually puts things off, a columnist can look around town and see alleys which need cleaning, church lawns uncut, signs needing paint, fences drooping and gates off their hinges. Comment on the alternative of (1) trying to live happily despite these eyesores and (2) taking the time and energy to keep a neat house, a clean store, an attractive town.

46. Prevention. Press services constantly remind us that this world is filled with wells to fall into, ditches to cave in, stairs which may collapse, dogs which may go mad, and bridges which are unsafe. Why not make a survey of such hazards in your area.

47. Animals. Animals are of human interest; i.e., they live with and are loved by people. Column subjects include unusual pets, barking dogs, poisoning of pets, dogs and mail carriers, dog shows, etc. But don't overlook cats, nor the animal hospitals with their lying-in rooms.

48. Beauty. Beauty is for those with eyes to see it. The columnist can point it out. Readers can offer
their versions. Housewives report finding rainbows in soapsuds, children find them in lawn sprays, and motorists see similar colors on wet pavements. Aviators report that the city dump is beautiful when viewed from 3,000 feet up. In season, trees and flowers form beautiful patterns of interest to amateur photographers. What is beautiful in your town?

49. Life at Forty. “When a man passes forty, no photographer can do him justice,” wrote Earl Tucker in the Thomasville (Ala.) Times. He described the person he imagined himself to be and contrasted it with the picture recorded by an impartial lens. Columnists approaching forty write in mock dread of the date but manage to express some good sense and no little humor.

50. Spelling. The argument goes on: Children are, or are not, being taught to spell as well as formerly. How is spelling taught today? Do teachers change their methods in a decade? What is the effect of listening — to radio — rather than reading? In a variation of theme, the Chilton (Wis.) Times-Journal rejoiced that the government had eliminated the first “c” in Kinnickinnic, but suggested cutting it to Kinnic, or even Double Kinnic. It added, “If we were running an august federal board we would run Kinnickinnic through the silage cutter, save one nic, and send the rest back to the Indians. Nic Street.”

51. Proposals. People often say, “There ought to be a law . . . .” Columnists make many such statements. The Adair (Iowa) News endorsed having all holidays on Monday in the belief that everybody would be better satisfied and business would be less disturbed. “A holiday hooked onto Sunday is so enjoyable and so sensible in its minor interruption with business that it seems strange that a demand for holidays on Mondays is not general,” the paper added.

And the Thomasville (Ala.) Times suggested this election year sign: “Jim’s Place, 6 miles — 7 votes.”
52. Work. People commonly think they work harder than other folks. What is work? What tires a white-collar worker? How tired is a postman at the end of a day? Here is a chance to clear up some misconceptions. And you might try to find out what it is in a shopping round with his wife that makes a man approach a state of collapse.

53. Birthdays. The "Shinglediggins" column of the Coloma (Mich.) Courier keeps a birthday book on local people. But in addition to reporting birth dates of readers, Joe E. Wells, the columnist, gives facts about famous people born on the same dates, and events of history.

54. Thinking. Education, it is said, should teach people to think. What is thought? How can the validity of thinking be tested? Why is there so much faulty thinking? And consider the relationship between thinking and moods. Consider the mood — and thoughts — of a man with an aching molar. Consider, too, that — no matter what emotions tug at them — people such as teachers, ministers, and clerks must face their publics with cheerful moods and thoughts.

55. Day by Day. The "Sun Beams" column of the Spring Valley (Wis.) Sun has the unusual paragraphing of being written by days of the week. Paragraphs open with the day set in light caps, followed by a dash. The matter following, however, is not limited to that day. A few columns run calendars of promotional events. Others remind readers of deadlines for taxpaying, voting, assessing property, etc.

56. The Ill. This is a doubtful classification, but some columnists issue simulated bulletins on conditions of persons — and pets — who are ill. In small towns, black eyes and sprained ankles need explanation. Columns do it best.

57. Dialogue. Instead of the usual prose comments, some columns use quotation forms. Example:
Jones — You can’t cheat old Father Time.
Brown — No, but some of the women drive a mighty close bargain with him.

— Rosetown (Sask.) Eagle

58. Change. News columns report what is new in a community — schools, people, smokestacks. Columnists can go a step further, analyzing what a new factory means in terms of new schools, playgrounds, and utilities. Growth imposes needs and penalties and there is no need to avoid inevitable adjustments. Columnists make them easier because they are better understood.

59. Styles. Some columnists rant at style changes, but most of them are more amused than disgusted. A feature angle may be found in the history of the wedding ring, throwing of rice, and other customs. Male comfort vs. adherence to male styles is worth analysis.

60. Correspondence. A columnist complained that while his writings had explained how legislators should handle the economy of his state, only two of them took the paper. Another columnist wrote letters to legislators and printed their replies. For three cents and the time it takes to write a letter, an editor may obtain needed information not only from legislators, but from corporations, colleges, museums, libraries, and many other sources.

61. Flabbergested. “So help me,” wrote a columnist in the Southwest, “I will take an oath. I swear that among the tourists I saw over the week end was a little girl, not more than eight years old, upholstered with falsies. Her mother should be jailed.”

62. Displays. Displaying in show windows materials mentioned in columns is good promotion. Such items may include oddities, photographs, garden produce, articles manufactured locally, letters, war relics, etc.
63. *Longevity.* Long and faithful service merits column mention. Included are longtime employees, old settlers, old machinery, antiques, and other subjects to which age has lent dignity, honor, and possibly enchantment.

64. *Quiet Living.* Columnists frequently champion sanity, safety, moderation, and similar virtues. “Simply sit by the fire and wiggle your toes,” urged one as an antidote for the usual week-end traffic fatalities.

65. *Do You Know?* Under such subheads are put facts from many sources, including state almanacs, encyclopedias, and textbooks. An hour’s work will produce enough for many columns, since they will be used sparingly.

66. *Subheads.* Small titles may be run in at the opening of paragraphs. The “This ‘n That” column of the Howard (S.D.) *Miner County Pioneer* begins paragraphs with a word or phrase, followed by a colon. These include “orchids,” to those it approves; “worth a try,” “how true,” “school days,” etc.

67. *Kibitzing.* Where people gather, there’s news. The “Looking and Listening” column of the Somerset (Pa.) *American* devotes some of its space to descriptions of kibitzers. Subjects vary from dog fights to the inevitable steam-shovels.

68. *Words.* A columnist, being a writing man, is likely to develop into an amateur philologist; i.e., a lover of words. He learns the common origins of clerk and Clark, Dick’s son and Dickson, wagon maker and Wainright. He finds that the word *derrick* originated in a hangman’s device; the hangman’s name was Derrick. He learns the power of Anglo-Saxon words as contrasted with multi-syllable words which obscure meaning.

69. *Direct Address.* Not very often does a columnist address an essay to “Dear Mayor” or other public or private figures. Used in anger, the device may be
extremely distasteful. Used in good taste and good humor, however, it may be an effective literary device.

70. Sponsorship. Real or fictitious clubs are sponsored by many columnists. These include bachelors' protective associations and societies for the advocacy of this and that. Targets include postoffice pens, wearing of neckties and coats on blistering summer days, and allowing low-hanging limbs over sidewalks to annoy tall men and ladies. Timeliness of such sponsorship adds much to its humor.

71. Puzzles. Reader responses to puzzles have been surprisingly good in many instances, particularly if the "dumb columnist" is weak in decimal fractions and some of his fans are strong. Preferably, problems are fairly easy but tricky. One columnist asked his readers to write a sentence explaining that the English language contains "to," "too," and "two." Incorrect, he said, is the statement that "There are three two's in the English language." Then readers went to work on it.

72. Skills. Columnists can balance personal mention and content by recognizing physical as well as mental skills. A quick survey will point to the baker, the barber, the bootmaker, the welder, and other craftsmen. Others are the skills of the housewife, the boys in their workshops, and the girls in their 4-H clubs. Some columnists sponsor hobby exhibits and the work of Scouts, home demonstration club women, and amateur photographers.

73. Pictures. What is a proper picture for a home? Should it be an original or a lithograph? How many local people encourage regional artists? How many pictures express the personality of a person, and a home? These are proper column subjects. Some columnists have convictions which lead them into wild controversies over trends in art. A few comment on art in libraries, schools, and courthouses.

We hope the pastors hereabouts will understand and forgive, when we say that newspapering can be sort of a religion. Some of the most financially successful newspapermen never acquire it but all of the happiest ones have it. "The Paper" is your life, your love and, as we have said, almost your religion. Not just a newspaper; not just your job, but "The Paper." — Ferndale (Mich.) Gazette.
Another thing that will hurry along your party is guests who hire sitters by the hour. — A. W. Perrine, Siloam Springs (Ark.) Herald and Democrat.

74. Prayers. These usually are timely, as suggested by the season. They are seen infrequently, and necessarily must be in good taste.

75. Adventures. Few columnists figure in crises worth mentioning, but sometimes they have hilarious times in imaginary happenings. Tongue in cheek, they write up adventures met in driving home over streets full of holes, crossing vacant lots at night, pushing their way through Saturday crowds, escaping a snowball fight between school kids, and fighting their way past a bargain counter to deliver a proof to a merchant.

76. Funerals. Comment on funerals and burial services usually is limited to important persons. Dignified yet sympathetic, these remarks avoid sentimentality and pagan attitudes toward death.

77. Thanks. When a paper is asked to express the Lions Club’s appreciation of minstrel props lent by a local lumber yard, the column may seem the proper place for this chore. The columnist may simply say he heard Lion President Joe Jones thanking Bill Smith, the lumber man, for the materials. If he knows both men well, he may clownishly add that the lumber will never be the same again, but that it probably was knotty anyway. He avoids giving the impression that it is a formal note of appreciation. Such notes are paid ads.

78. Ifs. . . . Lacking other ideas, a columnist may engage in “iffy” speculation. If he were rich, he would do so and so; if he were mayor, he would do such and such. He may ask readers to join him. Serious notes and hints for public officials may evolve.

79. Confessions. Admitting faults common to most persons is a columnist’s way of saying he is a regular fellow. He confesses that he is a poor husband (poor memory for anniversaries); a poor father (gives children too much money); a poor businessman (gives more to charity than he can afford); a
poor insurance risk (sees his dentist when he has to and his doctor, ditto).

80. Firsts. Most people are interested in first things—first cotton baled, first robin, first blooming century plant, etc. And things historical include first trial, first school, first fire station, and other local and regional beginnings.

81. Questions. Big questions perplex but little ones annoy. What little ones annoy you? Examples: How do you feel? Where have you been? Where are you going? What do you know? What do you want for dinner?

82. Male World. Some women say they detest being always addressed in terms of their femaleness—in styles, manners, thought, etc. And it may be a mistake to talk overmuch of the man's world. But columnists do write of dad's prerogatives in other lands, about male beauty vs. female plainness in other than the human species; about women in male attire, etc.

83. Bitter and Sweet. Under this heading go all those it-could-have-been-worse items, alibis, moral victories, and picking up the pieces after minor disasters. But remember that some people detest alibis and others seem to like to suffer. And a community, like an individual, can take itself too seriously.

84. Treasures. These are where the heart is. Columnists sometimes attend household auctions and report reactions of children to parting with toys and pets. But communities have treasurers, too. Some cling to outmoded city ordinances, ancient fire engines, and antiquated courthouses. Antiques may include a few librarians, politicians, and school teachers. But be kind; columnists also age. And by their writing columnists name their own treasures.

85. Reprints. These are hard to evaluate. Previous column material may be reprinted "by request." Choice bits are chosen, of course.

You're not really old until you like to be home on time.—Charles V. Mathis, Wildwood (N. J.) Independent-Record.
86. **Elder Statesman.** In some communities, essay-type columns are written by leading citizens who have large followings because of their long prominence as business or professional men. An instance is that of Dr. J. A. Hill of West Texas State College, now president emeritus of that institution. He writes a “Hilltop Views” column in the Amarillo (Tex.) *Times*. And to that column he doubtless took the interest gained by making countless speeches in his region over a period of thirty years as college president, and friendships with thousands of ex-students and fellow educators.

87. **Pest Control.** Household pests rank with the common cold in affecting people, who spend much time fighting flies, ants, termites, and rodents. Sometimes queer devices are used. The Fountain Inn (S.C.) *Tribune* reported seeing little wads of cotton fastened to screen doors. Flies avoided doors so treated. Other people electrocute flies. People’s reactions to common complaints are almost legendary. A famous editor is said to have sent a substitute to read his speech when he took to his bed with the rash of poison ivy. One person wrote him to compliment the speech, but six hundred sent remedies for poison ivy.

88. **Relatives.** Bob Burns is not the only humorist who talks about kinfolks. Columnists describe some mighty queer and some mighty wonderful relatives. For example, the “Read ’Em and Weep” column of the Park River (N.D.) *Walsh County Press* has written copiously of Uncle Dan. Dan was an unforgettable character with a sixth sense which told him when unseen persons were in a house.

89. **Births.** Clowning seems inappropriate when a child is born. But the Ada (Okla.) *Times-Democrat* manages something novel: “We have it on good authority that it was a blue cloud E. T. Carson was walking on Monday—and with good reason. Wife
Betty presented him a son Monday afternoon. But it was a pink cloud for the Rev. Paul Stephens Wednesday. He has a new daughter to go with his two boys."

90. Variations. Readers appreciate some departures from normal column organization, providing these are not too frequent. Don Whitehead, from an advanced regiment post in Korea, sent back an item reporting the soldiers’ lives as a society editor might write it. Clever columnists have written events through the eyes and ears of various people. Harvest time does not look alike to all persons. State fair is one thing to a first-time goer and quite another to the jaded oldster whose feet are “killing him.” Also readers’ entry into a subject can be guided by an introductory line. Examples: “Give your sense of justice a workout on this.” “Thoughts while waiting for a freight train to pass.”

91. White Lies. Many half-truths can be defended. Some are condemned. Columnists make the distinction. Turn through a college catalog, a tourist guide, a legal petition. Note the exaggerations, the wishful thinking, and misleading statements. Hometowners on vacation trips can send back reports on prices, availability of tourist accommodations, and whether the fish are biting. But don’t forget the libel laws.

92. Greetings. Some columnists write ponderous essays at the year’s end; others contrive easy ways to fill the space. One column was blank except for “Season’s Greeting” centered near the top. Another ran “Our Best Wishes for 195-” in vertically set 48-point type, filling the column.

93. Biggest Mistakes. Embarrassing moments and “The biggest mistake I ever made” are standard column subjects. Some readers don’t mind confessing that they quit school too soon, chose a wrong profession, failed to keep up music lessons, and experimented too long before starting a lifetime trade or profession. Similarly, local business men can tell
Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of both parties. — A. B. Jordan, Dillon (S. C.) Herald.

how they got started. Such articles can be timed to coincide with graduation of high school seniors who think on such things.

94. Salesmen. Traveling men know the value of the anecdote. In a way, they are columnists afield. Ask them for their latest printable story. They may be worth a short sketch if they are well known to store people. And they can tell about style trends and prices. Many of them influence merchant attitudes toward selling and advertising. They are part of the local scene.

95. Snappy Comebacks. Plant a leading statement and record the comebacks by the town's wiseacres. An editor or reporter covering a beat can quickly assemble reactions to a question, with or without names. These can be as timely as the latest headline.

96. Kids. Less civilized peoples make much of playing with children. Small-town columnists like to be known and liked by town youngsters, and called by name. Mention of a child in a column pleases parents and interests friends. Many such items go into scrapbooks. Some columnists regularly run pictures of children in or beside the column space. Pictures of dogs and other pets are not uncommon.

97. Odors. Columnists report what they see, hear, and smell. Their nose reports the news as they pass trees and flowers in bloom, alleys which offend, and business firms and factories with characteristic odors.

98. First Names. In small towns, people are Bill and Joe and Mary to their friends. Some columnists refer to Bill Jones; second reference is to Bill, and third is to Mary (everyone knows the Mary referred to is Bill's wife). Such intimate references also imply the people are well known to the columnist. It would be incongruous to err in mentioning a first name. It might be awkward to so refer to a dignified professional man, a consistent critic of the paper, or an elderly person.
99. *Exaggeration.* Some columnists would gag on such adjectives, but it is a fact that some very popular writers attend picnics and then report on them like this: "The most delicious basket lunches in the world are served by those wonderful, wonderful women of the Blank community." It does not seem to matter that similar superlatives are handed another group a week later, or were used a week earlier. But the writer's appreciation must be regarded as genuine.

100. *Candor.* People constantly delude themselves. When a man says "the people of this country believe" something he may actually mean that he, his wife, and a few friends believe it. In thinking aloud, so to speak, with and for his readers, a columnist has a chance to show good reasoning and to analyze poor reasoning. He can distinguish between spoken reasons and real reasons, spoken motives and real ones, and between opinions and facts. Better, he can ask questions which enable readers to derive truths and attitudes for themselves, by themselves. Implicit in the writing of a column is the obligation of the columnist to constantly examine his own thoughts, motives, and information in order that he more nearly find and present the essential truth behind the more or less objective stories in the news columns.

The columnist, in using techniques and subjects similar to many mentioned in this chapter, has purposes no less serious than those of the reporter or editorial writer. But he drops his serious phrases with a casual subtlety which catches the reader unawares, but nonetheless effectively. And the columnist would add that before you can hand a reader an idea you must first catch him.