

I Was More Gruntled When I was Dumber

I haven't been very happy lately. I'm pretty sure this problem began when I subscribed to the Wall Street Journal last year. A good, old-fashioned, I-killed-a-whole-tree newspaper.

That's in addition to, of course, my subscription to the Iowa City Press-Citizen. I've been a regular reader of the P-C since I first learned how to read in the middle of the last century. Recollections are getting dim, but I remember that paper as being much thicker then. Swatting a fly with one could break a wrist or window.

As everyone knows, the Internet has completely changed the way we receive our daily (if not hourly) information, and I'm afraid the Press-Citizen has slowly devolved into more of a multi-page daily flyer than a "real" newspaper. It pains me to say that considering my lofty status as an unpaid-but-happy-to-do-it monthly columnist for 25 years.

Publishing is a business with the same interest as any other – staying viable. Reduced revenues dictate reduced costs, and I'm happy the Gannett Company seems to be doing enough to make sure I have a local newspaper at all to be able to complain about. I believe most printed newspapers are ultimately doomed (circulation nationwide has steadily decreased since the early 1990's), but I fully support as many as possible hanging in there until the bitter end.

I'm disgruntled about this trend, which brings me back to the role the Wall Street Journal plays regarding my current overall level of gruntlement. I started receiving the Saturday edition last year, which underscored how much news – mostly bad – is occurring daily that I wasn't aware of. A lot of it happens in places I'd be hard-pressed to find on a world map.

It would probably take me six full hours to read every word in the Saturday WSJ. In addition to the huge financial section that you'd expect, there's in-depth national and international reporting, articles about politics, economics, tech, sports, the arts, real estate, you name it. It's reliable as well - I somehow receive the WSJ at the same time as my Press-Citizen. They magically appear well before dawn, as if conjured by faeries and pixies.

The Gannett Company is the largest newspaper chain in the country (measured by total paid circulation), and that obviously includes some “real” newspapers of its own. If you feel underinformed (or over-happy) you might start by subscribing to the Sunday Des Moines Register, which could easily kill a large number of flies on its own and has an Iowa emphasis to boot. I get the Sunday edition.

The P-C may appear emaciated in comparison, but I can’t discount the feeling that the fewer news stories of any kind I absorb, the happier I am. By that yardstick, the Iowa City Press Citizen may be just what we all need if our primary goal is to maximize our gruntlement. Better yet, I might cancel all of my newspaper and magazine subscriptions, toss out my TV, internet devices and radios (remember those?) and never leave the house while enjoying my dumb, fat and happy existence.

I must be living my life wrong. It shouldn’t be like watching endless loops of “Les Miz” or “It’s a Wonderful Life,” which are pretty much relentlessly depressing. Happily, I recently stumbled across several web sites that feature only happy news, including happynews.com and thehappynewspaper.com. I’ll try those for awhile to see if that doesn’t improve things.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons probably isn’t as glum as he may seem.