

What's Black and White, But Not Read All Over?

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How we get the news has a lot to do with sustainable communities: what we know about what's happening, diversity of viewpoints, and ideas of options for the future. Of course, newspapers have a lot to do with the news, but to what extent will they continue to be there for us?

Many of us Baby Boomers have warm memories of the newspaper, like seeing our parents reading the paper in the evening. Those memories now seem quite dated, like the memories which many of us have of our parents' smoking at home.

I have my own fond memories. When I was growing up in Winnipeg, my first paid job was delivering the *Winnipeg Free Press*. I can still remember how heavy the Saturday edition was. I was thirteen, and I remember the biggest story that I delivered: the death of Winston Churchill.

In those days, the front page of the paper was crammed with the beginnings of perhaps a dozen stories. The first couple of paragraphs would be on the first page, with the rest of the story continued on the inside. Walking up to the doors of my customers, I had the chance to read those first few paragraphs of each story.

When I got home, I was intrigued and wanted to read the rest of the articles. I became hooked on reading the paper. And what a smorgasbord of information the paper delivered! The news, naturally, but also the sports, editorials, horoscope, advice column, obituaries, the classifieds, the display ads, as well as - of course - the comics. The paper still delivers all this today, except the "lifestyle" section used to be called the "women's" pages.

Many kids today don't have those memories. Fifty years ago, the average North American household subscribed to at least one newspaper. Today, only one-half of households subscribe to the paper. The trend is continuing as young people increasingly get their news on the Internet: not only at home, but also on their phones or

other hand-held devices.

My generation thinks of holding a newspaper as being wrapped in comfort. My kids' generation thinks of a newspaper as awkward and bulky compared to a screen.

In response, newspapers are competing by offering more products in smaller formats and giving them away free of charge - like the paper you are now holding. As well, newspapers themselves play a big role in the digital landscape, as they provide much of the news content on the Internet.

Newspapers, however, have a conflicted relationship with the Internet. They still want paper subscribers. On the one hand, many papers, such as the *Brandon Sun*, offer only some of their news for free on the Net. On the other hand, some papers, such as the *Winnipeg Free Press*, offer some features (like blogs) only in their free Internet editions.

Despite the importance of electronic news, usually one cannot know about the local scene without subscribing to the local paper, in our case the *Brandon Sun*.

I am surprised, though, at the number of people who think they can know the community without bothering to read the paper. (Buying the occasional issue or glancing at a copy at work or at a coffee shop doesn't count.)

I have even met people who don't get the paper, yet aspire to sit on City Council. This fall, question your candidates. If they don't subscribe to the *Brandon Sun*, why would we vote for them?

I'll have more reflections on newspapers in a future column.

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