

A Good Time To 'Anatomize' A News Story

Someone once wrote: an anatomy of a murder and since then many topics have been anatomized. In today's column, I would like to do an anatomy of a news story.

The story chosen for anatomization is one which has been misunderstood by certain township officials. The anatomy is not a defense but an explanation of how a writer composes a news story.

THIS PARTICULAR story was a report of a grievance filed by the municipal employees union regarding an individual who had worked steadily as an electrical inspector for six months and was told "his services were no longer required by the township."

Supervisor Curtis Hall, at the last board meeting, commented the news report was in error because the grievance was not filed.

Our supervisor made a common error in stating the newspaper said something when, in fact, the paper was reporting what a news source claimed.

The normal reader might not see any difference being fired and being told not to report to work anymore.

Actually, though, there is a difference but it is the difference which accounts for the grievance. The main point of the grievance must be resolved before we know if the grievance was fired or not. All we know now is he is no longer working for the township.

With that beginning, let's begin our anatomy. I will open my mind for public inspection and let the readers know what thought process a writer employs when composing a news story.

THE STORY "began" with a phone call from the union steward relaying the information that Glenn Sallow had been fired because he was replaced by Rex Jerigan.

(Uh, a grievance story. That means there are two sides — labor and management. There has to be an unreconcilable difference of opinion because the grievance has already been filed.

"This means I have to get both sides and try to present a balanced report of the conflict. Well, the union's on the phone now so I might as well hear that side.)

George Crook, the union steward, gave me his opinion on why Sallow was let go. It was a plausible reason but opinionated. It was really irrelevant because point of the grievance was not why Sallow was fired but that he should have been without 30-days notice, etc. I won't use that quote.)

CROOK THEN says Jerigan was not qualified to be an electrical inspector but got the job because he was a friend of Curt Hall. The acquaintance stems from work Jerigan had done on Curt's trailer park in South Lyons, says George.

Is this relevant? Guess it depends whether Jerigan is qualified or not. What does Crook know about what qualifications are needed? (Let's see now. Crook has been the chief electrical inspector for the township and has done inspections for a number of years. Guess he knows more about qualifications than I do.)

George continued that Jerigan had been a licensed electrician for only three years and Sallow, on the other hand,

Daniels Den

By EMORY DANIELS

was well qualified to be inspector.

As further support that Jerigan was not qualified, Crook pointed out he had been asked by Hall to train Jerigan to handle inspections.

THE INTERVIEW continued and soon I had a couple pages of notes about the grievance. The next step was to get management's side. An interview with Curt Hall was accomplished.

Curt presented the township's side of the grievance and insisted Jerigan was well qualified. He admitted he knew Jerigan because Rex had done work on his trailer park in South Lyons. Curt then gave a description of Sallow's personality.

(Initial observation confirmed — there are two sides to this grievance. Curt presented a good case on why Jerigan is qualified. Sounds like I've got enough information to write a story presenting both sides.)

And so the interview was completed and the writer confronts his typewriter to inform readers a grievance has been filed and what it's all about.

WE NOW CAN begin our anatomy of the actual writing of this story. I will now start with a golden rule which guides all journalists who want to communicate.

A newspaper is more than a funnel, consuming words

spoken by others, condensing, and spitting out in a news story what others said.

To simply present both sides to a conflict, without adding background or explanations, is not communicating what has happened. A reporter is a communicator not a stenographer.

And so this news story must tell not only what happened (a grievance was filed) but attempt to tell why it happened. Otherwise, we can forget the story and let the union magazine report it.

Thus, when writing, the reporter continually asks himself questions the reader is likely to ask while reading the report. The attempt is to answer all questions in the story so the reader will not have any when finished reading.

THE PROCESS of asking questions readers might want answers for is called news judgment.

If a reporter's news judgment is good he comes close to providing all the information about an event which readers should know.

This story began with a simple statement a grievance had been filed. The outline is: union's side first; some of Hall's position; background explaining union's side; statements from Hall including background explaining management's position.

The story is about one-third finished and I have reached the

point where Crook claims Jerigan was hired because he had done work on Hall's trailer park. The writer now jumps into the shoes of his readers.

The reader asks: "what trailer park?" That seems like an obvious question to ask. Better give some background on the trailer park.

The story now continues with background that three township officials and a private resident formed a real estate company, Douglas Shenk, was not a

partner of the company are named because one is the supervisor who made the appointment of Jerigan, another is the clerk who will vote on the appointment, and a third is the building department head who will be the appointee's boss.

The name of the company and its address is then reported. At this point it becomes necessary to explain that the address belongs to the law offices of township attorney Joseph T. Brennan.

Another explanation needed is that Brennan is resident agent (private attorney) for the company. This is valuable information because it should tell the reader something to relieve any suspicions he might have at this point.

You see, there are no real estate transactions going on at Brennan's office. The fact this company has no office from which to buy or sell real estate should tell our readers the company was formed as an "ad hoc corporation" for purposes of making one investment and is not involved in weekly or monthly land transactions.

But, of course, it tells us something else. A grievance has been filed and replaced by a trailer park owned by a company which has retained Brennan as legal counsel. As township attorney, Terry will be

arguing the township's side of the grievance.

AM MAKING no value judgments at this point nor offering any conclusions. I am simply "thinking out" the story to determine what information the reader should know.

So, let us continue with our quest for unanswered questions. The private resident, involved in the real estate company, Douglas Shenk, was not a

familiar name with this writer. Assumption is now made that our readers also know nothing about Shenk.

All I know is Doug owned a trailer park on Orchard Lake in the township. He sold that park to Topp's for a department store. He doesn't seem to be a big developer. Maybe I should let the reader know so assumptions are not made township officials are messing around with big developers.

And so the story continues with an explanation of Shenk's sale of land to Topp's and subsequent partnership with Hall, Floyd Cairns and Bill Taylor.

THE BACKGROUND of Shenk's dealings with Topp's was intended only to identify him and point out that, from all the knowledge this paper has, Shenk is not a big land developer.

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Our Readers Write

Writer Upholds Rideout

EDITOR: I can't understand why John Allen would vote or argue against helping Rap Line to get the proposed site that has been chosen for them.

By now John Allen surely must know what a relation person we have in Rev. Ralph Rideout to lead our drug abuse program.

LOOK WHAT he has already accomplished, even if it has been a constant battle to find a place to house their center and administrative staff. He never tires of begging and praying for the proper funds.

He has always had a special desire to help troubled youth and even served as a chaplain for four years in the courts of Summit, Mass.

He can communicate with our youth and win their respect and help them. Many people in Farmington are well aware of how many troubled youth he has already helped.

When he resigned his church in Farmington, he said he "wanted to try and do something to make this a better world to live in and therefore" he felt that he "could contribute something by working with young people who were on drugs and try to reach them."

HE HAS WON the respect and full support of the clergyman, county, township and city officials and received most of Rap Line funds through these groups.

I shall always remember how

quickly Curt Hall gave his support and went to bat for Rap Line when things looked hopeless for Rap Line.

I do hope that John Allen and the others will get behind

our drug program and support it just as they did for the Community Center.

JEANNE WALLIN Farmington

Withhold Razing Letters, Nolan Supporter Suggests

EDITOR: After two weeks of verbal blasts at one another, I think it is time all involved grow up. First of all, I'm also a former neighbor of Tom Nolan. I did not choose to write in to answer Mrs. Catherine Vignoe's letter because everyone is entitled to his opinion.

However, what has gone on in the last two weeks is ridiculous. We all know that anyone who seves the township in office or works on various committees has got to be interested in good government. It's a thankless job.

Of course, Nolan's friends are going to defend him as did Mrs. Vignoe's, but why the name calling, etc.? I know the people who defended Nolan two weeks ago. They are all fine people as I'm sure are the people who defended Mrs. Vignoe. But why defend anyone in this manner?

Needs No Defense

EDITOR: Well, well, all the flurry of letters regarding Tom Nolan, candidate for "part time" treasurer, and Catherine Vignoe, concerned taxpayer and interested citizen, have finally died down.

It is my opinion that Mrs. Vignoe does not need defending. Then, there's Tom Nolan. Mrs. JUDIE MCKENZIE Farmington

Remarks included: "What did Sallow leave in your stockings?" "Do you attend meetings?" "She should take up sewing." "All letters must be hand-written at a coffee klatch."

These are silly and do not accomplish anything except ask for more of the same. Name any politician alive or dead, and you can start choosing up sides.

Possibly the way to settle this would be for your paper to print letters that are constructive, not destructive as were the last two weeks replies.

We, of course, offer poor example to our young people with our own mud-slinging and name calling.

I'm sure the voters of Farmington Township will settle this at the polls where it should be settled, and not with letters to the editor blasting persons we don't even know.

TOM DOYLE Farmington

Writers Say Sewer Policies Are Unfair

EDITOR: Farmington Township officials on June 25 mailed "estimates" of sewer costs in Farmington Acres. Most of the homes are in the center of one acre. On 151 feet it is \$3,232.19 and across the street on the same 151 feet the owner pays another \$3,232.19. That is \$6,464.38 to the contractor to run the pipe 151 feet.

We question the accuracy of these estimates. Because we have sandy soil our septic tanks are OK. We do not need and can't afford sewers. Most of us are retirees and just existing on social "insecurity."

Farmington Forum of August quoted Curt Hall's Siver Construction bids 30 per cent less than engineers estimate. Township will finance sewers on 10 Mile to Dobany Drive

and up Orchard Lake to Stamen Acres. Those property owners will pay only \$890 in fee." Compare that with \$3,232.19 plus interest for our sewers, the highest in the township.

Why are there so many policies? Springbrook is presently having sewers put in at \$1,600 each owner and they have soil problems because of their spring-fed lakes.

These are unfair practices and prices "if we wanted sewers." For those in the area who want sewers, why doesn't the township make the same deal — finance the sewer and charge \$890 (tap-in as quoted in paragraph two).

FLORENCE SARVER, HERMAN FRANK, CLARA FRANK, CHARLES CRINION, MAE CRINION, JESSIE THORNTON, GEORGE THORNTON, JANE SING AND DOROTHY NICHOLSON Farmington

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