

Surviving high school career day

Not long ago I was asked to host a booth for career day at a local high school. The woman soliciting my help was so pleasant that I agreed before fully understanding what hosting a booth meant.

She wanted me to advise impressionable teenagers about considering a high-paying career in journalism or column writing as a way to make a living. I think this woman might be one of the space people. Nobody could be that disillusioned. I panicked.

For nearly half my life I've worried about my offspring following my footsteps. Now this woman wanted me to encourage mere children who were looking forward to young adulthood to become members of the dreaded media. I feared lightning would strike at any moment if I even considered such a deed. Even columnists have limits on how far they are willing to compromise their nearly non-existent principles.

Nonetheless, a commitment is a commitment and I had agreed to help. So, I donned a coat and tie and gathered with the other career counselors in the school cafeteria where tables were set up like makeshift booths. An easel with a sign that said "Writing/Journalism" in large blue letters stood beside my table separating me from the next booth. My name was conspicuously beneath it. A plastic nametag that confirmed I was the person on the sign was pinned to my lapel.

The room was filled with counselors with real jobs like engineers, architects, police officers, accountants, and attorneys. None of them talked to me. The attorneys didn't even look my way.

Before long, students started filing into the cafeteria. I thought about what I would say if a group came into my booth. Then abject terror began to set in. What would I say? I had no idea. I should have prepared something. My mouth



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

was dry. I started to perspire.

Mercifully, none of the students came my way. They went to the booths with visual aids, brochures, and counselors who knew what they were doing. The architect had a scale model of a tall office building. The news anchor from the local TV station had a television camera with a cameraman and a monitor showing her face on the screen. I had nothing.

Every occupation in the room looked interesting except mine. How could I possibly compete with all the technology, glamour, and excitement that the other counselors had to offer? I couldn't.

Then I thought about what I really did for a living. The reality was sobering at best.

Just the thought of one of these bright young students dropping the big bomb and actually asking, "How do you write a column?" was enough to put me into orbit.

Should I tell the truth about columnists? I asked myself. Should I let the world know that we sit at home in front of our computer screens in our underwear in a constant state of high anxiety as we search what is left of our brains for an idea?

Could I bring myself to reveal that most of us should be in therapy because we're neurotic and phobic? Did I have the courage to tell a sincere unsuspecting student who is contemplating his or her future that columnists lead a panic-filled existence because we have no idea where the next idea will come from, if it comes at all? I didn't believe

for so much as a nanosecond that I was that courageous.

Most people think columnists just lie for a living anyway, I thought. Maybe I should just do what I do every day and rationalize the methods of my madness. I could say that I read the greats like Russell Baker, William Safire, and Dave Barry for inspiration.

They don't have to know that the real reason for reading the work of the rich and successful is to see if I can slightly alter one of their really good ideas and claim it for myself without getting arrested for plagiarism.

I could tell them that columnists begin every morning with a fresh outlook on life as we entertain profound and lofty thoughts while we do our magic and weave entertaining and interesting tales. But I didn't think I could do that either.

A tap on my shoulder broke my reverie. "Sir?" a young voice inquired. I looked up and saw that my table was filled with ten smiling faces. They were waiting anxiously for me to utter some gem of wisdom that was going to launch them on an exciting career as authors, journalists, or at best - columnists. I took a moment to gather my thoughts.

"So - how many of you want to be writers?" I asked. Nobody said a word. They looked at each other sheepishly. Then they looked down and in every direction except towards me. I asked the obvious question. "If you don't want to be writers, why are you here?"

A young girl looked up and said, "We thought this was computer sciences."

"Oh," I responded. "Sorry. You're on the wrong side of the easel. That's at the next table." They apologized and scurried away.

The bell rang a few minutes later. My part of career day was over. I guess it's just another part of that system I'll never understand.



Where in the World is the Jamestown Press?

Bob Bowen took the Press to the waterfront of Zanzibar on a recent trip.

Arts council to offer more classes

The North Kingstown Arts Council is announcing the start of three new classes.

Jeanne Paglio will teach "Water Soluble Pencils and You," which will be on Saturday, May 31, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The price is \$25 for residents and \$35 for non-residents. Materials will be provided.

"Painting Small Abstracts" will be taught by Fred Meli on Saturday, May 24, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. This course is designed for the beginner who has little or no previous abstract painting experience. The course will cover the basics: color, composition surface variations and design. Several exercises that will help a student to acquire a basic knowledge small abstract works of art.

The fee is \$25 for residents and \$35 for non-residents.

A series on Creative Watercolor, taught by Lorraine Bromley, will run on Tuesdays beginning June 10, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. The four-week series is \$60 for residents and \$85 for non-residents.

For more information, visit www.NKArtsCouncil.org, or call 294-3331 ext. 241.

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