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How the news is gathered

Internship at Trib taught me journalism is about relationships

As a Baylor University journalism major, I read daily newspapers to prepare for weekly current events quizzes, but until I began my summer internship at the Waco Tribune-Herald, I had no concept of what working in a newsroom was actually like.

Newspapers may be flat, gray, mass-produced stacks of paper, but the newspaper industry is anything but dreary and impersonal.

Of course, there are unexciting assignments, and there is quite a bit of research that goes into many of the stories, but the very nature of the news business means that any story is likely relevant, new, important or just odd.

No matter what the assignment, my favorite part was meeting and talking with people.

I found many interview subjects inspiring, from businessman Freddie Kish, one of the hardest-working men I've met, to the DFW Purebred Rescue volunteer who showed cats to get them placed in good homes.

Each of these individuals had interesting stories and taught me a little about Waco, which I've found has a lot more to offer than initially meets the eye.

Somewhere between helping cool off elephants at the zoo with enormous popsicles, sitting in on the trial of a man charged with nine DWIs and visiting a cupcake bakery, I realized I have had one of the most interesting summers of all my peers — and all without leaving town.

At the very beginning of my internship, I shadowed crime reporter Kirsten Crow and court reporter Tommy Witherspoon.

Crow and Witherspoon knew almost everyone they came into contact with, whether they were security guards, administrative staff, police officers, lawyers or judges.

Witherspoon, or "Spoon" as he's affectionately known at the courthouse, has formed genuine relationships through the years with the staff there and reserves the right to tease them to no end.



JESSICA CHIA

Guest columnist

Crow is one of the Tribune-Herald's most recent hires, but she also has formed relationships of mutual trust and respect with the officials on her beat.

Writers like Sandra Sanchez, Mike Copeland and Cindy Culp are not only veteran reporters but Wacoans with families, and their personal ties to and investment in the community are evident.

Those sincere relationships are what prompt community members to volunteer tips on stories and freely share information when they can provide it.

One broadcast news reporter I ran into while interning complained that she could never find any news during the summer months. She asked one of our staff writers to explain how they always happened to come across great stories.

The contrast between a reporter who hasn't made the effort to really get to know the people he or she approaches and one who does was so clear at that moment.

But, genuine connections with others must be natural and occur through time.

When I got my own assignments, I certainly didn't have established relationships with the people I dealt with, so the staff writers let me in on which experts to call for which stories and shared any contact information they had on hand, just as they would with other colleagues.

Although some newsrooms are cutthroat environments, this newsroom operates on the premise that cooperation only leads to stronger stories and better information for the readers, especially when you're up against a deadline.

Of course, every office has its share of eccentricities: Carl Hoover has managed to fit the highest volume of books, papers and unknown objects possible into one cubicle; the entire office is swathed in the most unique beige-and-mauve (or is it wine?) color scheme; and the men in the newsroom have an unusual affinity for checkered button-down shirts.

Dated decor aside, I've learned so much during my summer interning for the Waco Tribune-Herald. I gained knowledge about writing, reporting and what it's actually like to work in the industry, though I'll spare readers the technical details.

I now feel certain that my chosen career will be anything but mundane.

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