

Paper Boy by Steve Spangler

I was a “paper boy” when I was young. I delivered newspapers to homes in my neighborhood. When we lived in Toledo, Ohio, my brother Scott, who is four years older, had a paper route for the Toledo Blade. When I was eight and nine I would occasionally substitute for Scott. So, I started early on my paper boy profession.

When I was nine, in the fourth grade, we moved to Lima, Ohio. My younger brother Jim and I got a paper route for the Lima News. I don’t remember how we signed up for the route. I guess Dad took care of that. It was a big paper route, so Jim and I split it. I had the larger part because I was a year and a half older than Jim. A difference at age 11.

We delivered the paper in the afternoon, after we got home from school. We also delivered some out-of-town newspapers to a few customers on our routes — the Toledo Blade, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, and even a New York Times.

A Lima News truck dropped off two bundles of newspapers at our home in the afternoon. The bundles were bound with a copper wire. Jim and I opened the bundles with Dad’s wire cutters from his work at the Ohio Bell Telephone Company.

We counted the papers into stacks for each of our routes. We then folded each paper and tucked the fold into the opposite edge. It formed a tight package that we could throw from our bikes on the sidewalk to front porches.

We loaded the folded papers into our Lima News canvas bags. The bags had flaps that covered the bags when it rained. We hung the bags on our bikes, one on the front handlebars and two over the rear wheel. When it rained, we walked up to each house and put the paper in a box on the porch or inside the screen door. When it snowed more than an inch or so, we walked our routes. It wasn’t safe on our bikes.

The Ohio winters were tough for paper boys. We often had to walk through deep snow up to our waists. That sounds like a “When I was young I had to walk uphill to school, both ways” type of story. But it was true.

On Sundays we delivered the paper in the morning. It was bulky and heavy. In the winter it was dark when we started out — the street lights were on when started and off when we finished.

The hardest part of being a paper boy was “collecting” every Thursday night. We went to the houses on our routes and collected 35¢ for the week — about \$3.00 in 2017 dollars. Nobody mailed a check or paid at the Lima News office. Each family had a card with 52 weeks printed around the edges. We carried a hole punch and punched the cards to record that they had paid. Almost everybody paid with coins, so I had coin changer on my belt.



Each house was different.

I had the Fluoride Lady on my route. Like many communities in the late 1950s, Lima was planning to add fluoride to the municipal water supply. The Fluoride Lady was convinced it was a Russian Communist plot to poison Americans. Every week I had to listen to her go on and on.

A Korean War veteran and his family lived in another house that was just a basement. He told me was building the house on the installment plan. But, he never added to the house while I lived in Lima.

Some people would invite me in while they got the money to pay me. So, I saw snippets of Groucho Marx's "You Bet Your Life" and other Thursday night television shows.

In the winter people would invite me in to get warm. I didn't like that at every house. My glasses would fog up and I'd have to take them off to see. My eyesight was so poor that I couldn't really see anything without my glasses.

A "skill" I learned in collecting was to be able to hear if a doorbell rang when I pushed it, or I had to knock. I could also tell if people were coming to the door by the slightest sound inside the house — they could be in the basement and start walking toward the stairs — and I would hear and know to relax, somebody was coming to pay me.

After collecting, Jim and I would come home and spread all our coins and a few dollar bills on the living room floor. We would count our money and then fill paper coin rolls — 40 quarters in a \$10 roll, 50 dimes in a \$5 roll, 40 nickels in a \$2 roll, and 50 pennies in a 50¢ roll. We were rich!

The Lima newspaper business became very interesting in February 1956 when Freedom Newspapers based in Orange County, California bought the Lima News. Freedom Newspapers was controlled by Raymond Cyrus Hoiles. Time magazine described Hoiles as "a crabby, Bible-spouting zealot ...famed for his ultra-reactionary political philosophy and his one-man campaign against a series of things he wrapped up under one label: socialism. By Hoiles's definition, socialistic institutions include: public schools, churches, public libraries, taxes, majority rule, highways, unions, and the National Association of Manufacturers." (Time, July 15, 1957,

<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,809676,00.html>)

Hoiles reduced staff at the Lima News. He was not expected to renew the union contract when it expired in a year. That bothered many in a heavily unionized manufacturing city like Lima. The newspaper took a libertarian viewpoint. It was against fluoridation and fought bond issues for a public parking garage in downtown Lima, and a community convalescent home. When the paper opposed a bond issue to build a new library, the community — both business and labor leaders — reacted. The library bond issue passed with a 76% majority. Then several business men and many citizen investors, started a rival newspaper named the Lima Citizen. The community welcomed the new newspaper and circulation quickly exceeded that of the Lima News.

Jim and I switched from delivering the Lima News to the Lima Citizen. That decision was made by my Dad along with other families we knew.

Freedom newspapers fought the Lima Citizen by starting the Lima Shopper that was distributed free to all Lima homes. To advertise in the Lima Shopper, businesses also had to buy ads in the Lima News. In 1964 the U. S. Department of Justice sued Freedom Newspapers accusing them of violating the Clayton and Sherman Antitrust Acts by intentionally operating The News at substantial annual losses and by buying various features, services, comics and syndicated columns so that the Citizen could not use them. But it was all resolved in 1964 when Freedom Newspapers bought the Lima Citizen. (New York Times, November 20, 1964, <http://www.nytimes.com/1964/11/20/lima-ohio-news-is-sued-by-us-as-a-monopoly.html>.)

But my paper boy story ended at the end of 1957 when I was in the 10th grade and I started an after-school job at the Lima Public Library. Two years later the Library moved into a new library building, the building that Mr. Hoiles and the Lima News had so vehemently opposed.

I have wondered if, now that I am retired, could I return to Lima and be a paper boy again. I found my answer on the current Lima News website (www.limaohio.com/delivery):

Deliver the Lima News

WANTED: Independent distributors of The Lima News

TOP TEN REASON BEING A LIMA NEWS CARRIER IS A GREAT SIDE GIG TO EARN \$500 TO \$1200 PER MONTH.

APPLY TODAY AND INQUIRE ABOUT A SIGN ON BONUS!

1. Just like in a restaurant, some customers tip for good service when they pay for their subscription
2. We offer a \$50 gas card incentive with good service for your first month
3. Our carriers earn great finders fees for helping us find new carriers.
4. As an independent contractor, your expenses are tax-deductible.
5. Our carriers don't have to worry about collections. Our subscribers pay the office directly.
6. Most routes can be completed in 2 to 3 hours.
7. Our city routes are very low miles and easy on your vehicle and fuel tank.
8. Lima News delivery is a great way to add to your household income.
9. Being a Lima News carrier is a great way to get your exercise every day.
10. When your delivery is done, you're back home before breakfast!

Must have a reliable car with a valid driver's license and insurance.