

Neither all good nor all bad

Wed. Apr. 30

I happen to be a journalist.

I know you think all journalists are the scum of the earth. I've heard enough of that and I'm not going to listen anymore.

I won't apologize. I have no need to. It's my career.

"You're a journalist!" a saleswoman at a condominium complex I visited once said in horror. "Well, the last time a journalist came here, he tore this place apart. (in a story, I assumed). I don't like journalists."

Her rudeness astounded me. Any chance she may have had to sell me her product vanished in that instant.

"Well, I don't like salespeople, either," I wanted to respond. "Do you know how many worthless products I've been sold?"

Whenever conversation with friends turns to my career, I hear about ambulance chasers, and the amount of bad news in papers compared to the amount of reported good news.

"Journalists always intrude on people who are sorrowing, and ask the hard and tough questions," I've been told. "Give the people a break."

I think they've been watching too much television.

It's been my experience that sorrowing people call us and want to talk. Some people get angry with us because we don't "exploit" their story enough.

Granted, there are journalists who give journalism a bad name.

They consistently write irresponsible articles that misquote, misrepresent, and randomly accuse people of crimes no one can prove they committed.

Newspapers like the *National Inquirer* tell "true" and tall tales of baby-eating Martians, and the extra-marital affairs of such American Romeos as Lawrence Welk and Billy Graham. But that's not journalism — that's entertainment.

Newspapers and journalists don't have a handle on irresponsibility or villainy.

Doctors, lawyers, dentists, psychologists, salespeople, businessmen, school committee members, politicians, bicycle repairmen, and gas station attendants, among other professionals, also have their share of corruption.

Every time I talk to a psychologist I don't assume he twists the minds of patients, or rapes them during counseling sessions.

Why do so many people assume every member of my profession is out to get them?

The smart person learns to use



The Blank Page

Karen Cubie

If the company's personnel were smart, they'd look at the phone call as free advertising. Most companies pay to get their names in print. I'm asking them if I can give them good publicity for free.

Everybody occasionally makes mistakes. As much as we'd like you to believe it, journalists are no more perfect than anybody else.

Some assignments can be overwhelming. A city council reporter may find himself covering a story about fluctuating oil prices, or a feature writer may one day be handed an assignment dealing with a court case she's never heard about.

I remember one conference about groundwater contamination I had to cover in Cohasset this summer.

I sat through the meeting and took notes as copiously as possible.

But the meeting wasn't geared to the members of the press, and the speaker spoke rapidly, using large technical terms I couldn't spell or pronounce — never mind understand.

I took my story as much from the horse's mouth as possible, and I stuck around late to ask for the spelling of certain words and phrases.

I still had precious little idea of what I was writing about, but I had to formulate a story.

Sometimes people say one thing and mean another. Reporters are not mind readers and cannot pick up on the difference. We usually have to assume what you say is what you mean.

Other people will blurt comments out, and when they see it printed in the paper they say, "I can't believe you printed that!"

Don't tell a reporter something you don't want to see in the paper. I'm paid to spread the news, not keep it secret.

One time I called a company for a short blurb to be printed in this year's Progress Edition. I in-

roduced myself as a reporter over the phone, and explained my intent to do a short story.

The company representative politely answered all my questions, and at the end of the interview asked, "Can I ask you a question?"

"Yes," I responded.

"Are you going to put this in the paper?"

Is this a trick question? I thought. Why would I tell you I was a reporter calling to do a story and ask you questions if I didn't plan to put it in the paper?

I'd like to know what he thought I was going to do with the information — type it up, frame it, and hang it by my bathroom mirror?

I understand that salespeople aren't all greedy. I know all lawyers aren't corrupt. I don't think every doctor will charge my insurance agency twice for the same visit.

There are nice people and nasty people in every profession.

Every business has both competent and incompetent employees.

Every employee has good and bad days.

Journalists are no exception.

"THERE IS THAT ONE SMALL PROBLEM"

