

Life As An Editor

By Frank Ambrogio

Prior to my involvement in the old car hobby, I had never been a member of any organization. When I helped start our local Studebaker chapter in 1983, things changed quickly. For some reason, I was elected president and served in that capacity for seven years. During that period, I got involved with the newsletter and became our editor in 1989. I had never done anything remotely close to putting a newsletter together, so it was both a learning experience and a challenge.

My job as a computer programmer/analyst provided me with a decent working knowledge of computers and word processors. I bought a home computer about a year earlier and tried to adjust from working on a large main frame system to a desktop PC.

Probably the best thing I ever did during my misspent youth was teach myself to type when I was 12 years old. My older sister was taking typing in school and our parents bought a portable typewriter for her use at home. I found the instruction booklet, learned which fingers were assigned to press which keys, and practiced. This was not an electric unit, so it took a little more effort to press down on a key, and a bell rang when the platen was nearing the end of a line. Pushing a little extended lever from right to left shifted the page to the left margin and down one line. Now, as the old joke goes, *I type so fast that my fingers never leave my hands.*

As for the newsletter, formatting and entering the text was easy. Trying to add some graphics, such as the Studebaker logo, or photos involved a lot more work. The only way I knew was to cut out the graphic and tape it on the page. This always led to a shadow along one or two edges when copies were made. Scanners were available later, but were far too expensive. A full page black and white scanner was around \$1200.00. I did invest in a b/w scanner in the mid 1990s when I found one *on sale* for \$800.00. *Now you can buy a great color scanner for little more than the price of a Big Mac!*

Technology skyrocketed and software had improved to where I could scan an image and slip it right into the digital version of the newsletter. I remember being thrilled the first time I did an entire newsletter without using a scissors or tape. Today, with color scanners and sophisticated software, anyone with a nominal amount of skill can produce a fine quality newsletter. It can be as simple as typing a document in a word processor program.

Probably the best thing about being the chapter editor is that (s)he has the power to project the chapter's image. A chapter can be having problems, but the editor can make it appear as though it is doing great. This might attract more members, some who might actually do something. And, most important, the editor always *gets the last word!*

But, life as an editor isn't all *cookies and cream*. The biggest problem *is the readers!* I can offer a few examples to which anyone who has ever put together and distributed a newsletter can relate.

It's in there! This is probably the most annoying and most often occurring experience. After spending anywhere from 10 to 30 hours on a newsletter, this scenario unfolds.

At a meeting, someone would say something like, " I really enjoyed *your* newsletter and whenever it arrives in the mail, *I read every single word.*" I always explain that it is not *my* newsletter, it is *our* newsletter.

Then during the meeting someone will raise a question. It might be something simple such as, “when is the next meeting?” Answer: On the second Saturday of the month, just as it has been for the past 30 years. I always go to great lengths to make sure the information is in the newsletter. I guess the folks who *read every word* skipped a whole paragraph along the way. When I’m gone, the inscription, “It’s in the newsletter”, will be on my tombstone.

One particularly annoying incident occurred when our secretary asked about something we had discussed at several prior meetings, yet he claimed he had no knowledge of said event. I looked in the newsletter and found the information. It was included in the minutes of the previous meeting duly printed in the newsletter. Now follow along here: Who submits the meeting minutes? Who asked the question? If you answered *the secretary* to both questions, you get a gold star! I however, got an ulcer!

Oops! Let’s face it, editors aren’t perfect. No, it’s true! Honest! When I do a newsletter, I take the previous issue and modify it. It is much easier to delete what I don’t want from the last issue, than it is to re-enter all the information in the new one. In this instance, I was generating the May-June issue. In the text identifying the issue, I changed March to May, and changed April to June. However, I failed to delete the “r” from March, before adding the “y” so the issue was identified as Mary-June. I was astonished at how many people spotted that one character error, but apparently missed the whole paragraph, *in bold letters*, explaining that it was time to pay their annual dues.

Can we get that into the newsletter? Whenever we plan an activity, we may discuss it over the course of a several meetings. Once all the planning is done, someone will invariably ask if we can get that in the newsletter. Everyone seems to think it is the editor’s job to gather all the information, create any maps that might be appropriate, identify contact information, indicate the time, date, and place, etc., and put it nicely in the newsletter. My answer to that question is simply, we can if we send it to the editor!

In my particular case, our chapter went for years without an activities director, so events were put together in a rather haphazard fashion. Basically it was everyone suggesting what we needed to do, but nobody offering a method to get it done. To our credit, this was duly recorded in the meeting minutes by the secretary. However, the secretary felt it wasn’t necessary to submit the minutes to the editor. Maybe it was because of the prior mentioned incident. So, if members weren’t at the meeting, they didn’t get the information. For several years, I used to put some *unofficial meeting minutes* in the newsletter, but finally in frustration, I stopped. It isn’t the editor’s job to instill logic in the members’ minds.

Want Ads! Everyone likes to read about what is out there in terms of cars, parts, and assistance. The *want ad* section is the way to go. Unfortunately, most people are too lazy to write their ad and get it to the editor. Today, Email is the perfect way to submit an ad, but even that is also too much work. Instead, the phone would ring and the caller would want me to take down all the information. Of course, (s)he is talking much faster than I can write. *I don’t write as fast as I type!*

When I hang up, I have trouble deciphering my scribbled notes. After writing everything down initially, I now have to type it into the newsletter. Twice the work for me, all because the seller couldn’t pick up a pencil. This puts the burden on me to get the ad correct. However, I will not call back! The ad will appear as best I can describe it. If they are too dumb and too lazy to do it right, they can suffer the consequences. Did you see that ad for a nice Avanti for \$2000? Sure the price stated was missing a zero, *but that’s nothing!* Finally, I decided I would not accept

ads over the phone anymore. This decision was met with some indignation, but it sure worked out better for me. *Want ads rarely appeared in the newsletter after that!*

Diarrhea of the Mouth: I can't tell you the number of times I've been cornered by a member at a meeting or other event who insisted on relating a story that did *not have an ending*. I'd patiently stand and listen and sometimes I might even ask questions. On and on (s)he would go. Finally, I'd suggest that (s)he write the story for the newsletter so everyone could *enjoy* it. That usually stopped the diarrhea of the mouth, but led to hemorrhoids of the hands. The person expected me to remember every detail of the saga and then type every word into the newsletter. *Sure! That's why I'm here!*

Most members think it is the editor's job to write the newsletter. In fact the job is to collect everything, put it into some readable format, and distribute it. Most members think that if they do submit an article of any length, they have done their part. News flash folks! There will be another newsletter out next month, and the month after that. There is no sense printing blank pages. Supporting the newsletter is everyone's job and the job never ends.

Sorry I'm late! No! I'm not talking about what your girl friend said when you were living life to the fullest in college! I'm still discussing newsletters here! Stay focused! I'm trying to make a point!

For a number of years I exchanged newsletters with roughly 30 Studebaker Drivers Club chapter editors and about 10 other old car club editors. I got to know the names of quite a few of the other chapters' members, and met many of them at SDC International meets or local shows. I was aware of what was happening all around the country. In all the years I've been an editor, I've never been late getting an issue distributed. A lot of other editors didn't have as good a track record, but at least they were getting it done, eventually. Often I'd receive a newsletter and one of the first things I'd read would be, "Sorry! This issue is late, because I had to"

This always made me cringe! I hated it when an editor apologized for getting the newsletter out late. Editors please, *never, never* apologize for delivering a newsletter, no matter when it finally gets printed. Your members should be thanking you every time they receive one.

I've known people who have been their chapter's editor for 20-30, and more years. I don't know their individual situations, but in my case, I did it for 25 years because no one else would step up and take the job. Whenever I suggested that we needed a change, everyone would say, "*oh but you do such a good job.*" Translation - "*I don't want to do it, so suck it up. You're stuck with it. It's a cradle to grave job!*" The editor's job can not sit unfilled for any length of time or the chapter will simply deteriorate and/or die. In this case, *no news is bad news*.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed putting the newsletter together. I could be as creative as my talent and imagination would allow. But printing, folding, stapling, labeling, applying postage, and mailing wasn't so much fun. Only three times did someone offer to help, and that was because they were at my house at the wrong time. *No one ever came back.*

I'm better now! As times change, so does the way we do things. Although I'm no longer our chapter's editor, I still do two other newsletters. Some things have gotten better during the past 30 years. Being able to print the labels using computers was a welcome innovation. Self stick labels and self stick stamps have been a blessing. An electric staple machine has had a soothing effect on my hand. Try punching down on a stapler 400 times and see how great you

feel afterwards.

But, probably the best thing to come along is the Internet. Most recipients now accept the newsletter by Email. Of those 400, only about 100 get it by mail now. I also post the newsletter on our web site, so anyone can get to it that way at any time. It is a much better quality product with amazing definition, and it is in color! All of this has saved me time, effort, and money, three things I'm happy to save.

Here's your bonus! If you as an editor need some reinforcement, SDC has a newsletter competition which any chapter editor can enter. The editor simply submits each issue to the appropriate committee members who analyze and rate it. Awards are announced at the International meet and are printed in the club's magazine.

Prior to my becoming editor, my wife Anita served in that capacity for two years. The newsletter received a 3rd place award in 1987 and she received, ironically, the *Golden Hawk Award*, for the most improved newsletter. The awards were presented, to her surprise, during the banquet in Estes Park CO.



GREASY PRINTS
Orlando Area Chapter
Anita Ambrogio, Editor



GREASY PRINTS
Orlando Area Chapter
Anita Ambrogio, Editor

I on the other hand, did not participate except for one year around 1989-90. The incident that caused my exit was when, while judging the *same issue*, one judge scored a 10 for the cover and another scored a 2. Too wide a discrepancy for me. I decided I would be my own judge. I never cared about awards anyway. If I was happy with the end product, and was proud to put my name on it, what other endorsement did I need?

Two categories I felt were unfair, at least to me, had to do with *Membership Participation, Sharing of Experiences, Stories, Humour (20 points)* and *Original Features, Technical Information, & Car Care (20 points)*. These should be submitted by the members. I didn't feel it was fair to penalize the editor if no one in the chapter supported the newsletter. Some chapter editors get great support from their members and would get up to 40 extra points. *Have you done anything to support your editor?* Or, do you think the newsletter is everyone else's job?

Despite the above, I feel the judges do a great job and applaud their commitment. If you are into awards, this may provide you with some sense of achievement. Of course, if you don't win, you might get more frustrated. Even if you don't win anything, it is a good way to make your newsletter better. The folks who do the evaluating can offer some good suggestions. Give them a chance. Maybe they can help you set the bar a bit higher.

Taking that first step! If you've ever considered becoming an editor for your chapter, I hope what I've written will give you some insight into what to expect. I hope I haven't discouraged any future editors. There are frustrations and the amount of work you put in is up to you. If nothing else, you'll have some great stories to tell. *You might even write an article about some of them.* Knowing all this ahead of time can help you prepare your defense and establish some guidelines. It would be a good idea to include them in each issue, so everyone understands the rules. Just make sure you put yourself in control and stick to your guns.

The last word! The next time you see your chapter's editor, don't compliment him/her. Instead

hand him/her a copy of an article you wrote, and promise to do at least one more during the next six months.