

## YOUR VOICE

# The morning routine, and not messing with a good thing

By **HOWARD V. SANN**

I grew up reading newspapers. The morning paper delivered right to the door — the routine provides a structure in which I seek to achieve some daily perfection.

Reading the newspaper online through a slab of vertical glass and scrolling with a mouse just isn't the same as having a newspaper in my hands — the way the paper feels between my fingers, the crinkling sound it makes, the smudge of newsprint on my fingertips. All are part of the ritual of the morning paper: my calm.

So the day starts well when I go downstairs and see the paper lying on the doormat in its yellow plastic bag. On the rare occasion when it's not there (even the great Mariano Rivera occasionally uncorks a wild one), I am apoplectic,

unsettled, and trudge upstairs cursing this delivery guy whom, in fact, I mostly admire — worship, really — who gets the morning paper to my front door with astounding consistency and alarming accuracy.

The newspaper not reaching the door is like the waitress not bringing the food all the way to the table. Like when I lived a few blocks over. The first two days of that subscription, the paper was lying in a puddle on the sidewalk like road kill. I canceled.

Now, with the Internet threatening newspapers' very existence — one student of the vanishing Fourth Estate predicting doorstep delivery ending around 2043 — I find myself in blessed beginnings: elevated to a kind of newspaper delivery Heaven. You see, I've got a guy with a rifle arm throwing strikes to my door: I mean, even Tony Soprano had

## About the writer

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to go down the driveway for his paper. I get the kind of treatment I imagine someone like Paul Newman gets.

I am spoiled, in part, because my father was a career newspaperman, and growing up there were several newspapers at the door, every morning, every day. In the mid-1950s, as a teen, I cultivated a newspaper route, delivering the same paper my father worked on. So, from a young age, I understood the unspoken relationship between the subscriber and the deliverer.

Now the newspaper is here every single morning, in virtually the very same spot; always in reach. The uncanny nature of this long-range

precision has fascinated me to the point where some days I rise early and peer out my third-floor window down at the quiet, dark street, waiting for the paper guy; needing to witness.

Suddenly, the car appears in the street — seemingly materializing out of nowhere. Tinted windows, and the driver is zipping — reversing, turning, jerking forward — until perfectly aligned, like Peter Sellers' Doctor Strangelove adjusted his wheelchair to assume his seat at Kubrick's Doomsday table. Then the driver's window starts dropping. When it's all the way down — thwip! — out it shoots: as if shot from a cannon, a clay pigeon shooting through the air; the morning paper is on its way, airborne, sailing and gaining speed, a line drive, a frozen rope, the ultimate Frisbee throw, dropping smack onto the

middle of my doormat.

This is not absent the degree of difficulty presented by cars (even SUVs) parked in the street in front of the house blocking a clear path, about 45 feet from point of street launch to front door. Still, my guy's high skill makes it seem as if those vehicles aren't even there. Thus, the arc of my newspaper delivery is akin to Evel Knievel blasting himself over the Colorado River — except, making it.

One detail best demonstrates my guy's level of mastery. Our first 10 months in this two-family house, we occupied the first floor apartment — porch door right. When the second-floor tenant left, we moved to the upstairs apartment, making our front door porch door left. We had, in effect, moved 44 inches west. What would happen with the paper? Two days before the move, I called the subscription

office to have the address change relayed to the delivery guy.

Sure enough, like clockwork, the morning after we'd moved, there it was: my newspaper, on the doormat, in its yellow bag — porch door left! I've got the Tiger Woods of newspaper deliverers. ...

Going down for the newspaper the other day, my new neighbor was on the porch, smoking a cigarette. I went out, picked the paper up off the mat, and said, "It amazes me the guy gets it here every day."

"Actually," my neighbor began, "it's in front of my door every morning and when I come out, first thing I do is kick it over to you."

He played soccer in high school. I didn't know whether to thank him or call the newspaper to complain.

I did neither; why disturb what was working perfectly.