

A few days ago I walked down the lane to the mailbox to see what our carrier had brought us. I wasn't expecting more than the newspaper and perhaps a bill or two. I had just received a letter from my letter writing friend, so I wasn't looking for anything from her.

When I opened the mailbox, I saw, along with the newspaper and assorted junk mail, a large manilla envelope. I recognized the handwritten address. It was from the Tustin librarian, Sandie Leach. I had no clue about the contents until I came into the cabin and opened the envelope.

There were several stapled copies of The Tustinaire, the school newspaper that was published every year I was in high school. A patron had given the library a number of old copies of the paper. When Sandie saw that my name was included in the staff of the papers from certain years, she picked out those issues and copied them and sent them to me.

What a treat! It isn't that there is so much of importance in those papers, but they bring back lots of memories of working on the paper. The year that I edited The Tustinaire—it was always a senior's job—we were very lucky in having Jim Engelhard, our English teacher, as our advisor. He trusted us to put out the paper. If we had a problem, he was happy to help us with it. If we did not, he left us alone.

As far as the newspaper's production went, this was just fine. We all had learned what we needed to do, and we did not procrastinate when it came time to get the paper out. There were a couple of occurrences when I could have used a bit of help, and once, when I was not in the paper room, someone in authority discovered two girls smoking in the stairway that was our fire escape from the basement room. But, all in all, everything went smoothly.

That was the heyday of the mimeograph, and that was the technology available to us when we put out the paper. I am very glad to have had that experience. Computer programs can be a real nuisance, but they are generally workable and don't involve many of the skills that were necessary for us to learn to publish the school paper. And, it was a lot of fun and a lesson in cooperative labor.

It was the old "cut and paste" method—in the original meaning of "cut and paste" that involved scissors and paste or glue. To get the material to utilize this physical act someone first had to write an article or report. Then, she or he set the margins of the manual typewriter for a column width of, if I remember correctly, 22 spaces. As the typist tapped out the text, seldom did words and spaces come out to exactly 22 spaces. Now, with the features on word processing programs, one only needs to specify "justify" for this to automatically happen. But, with the old manual typewriters, we could still produce nice, clean copy with even columns. So, in typing the rough copy, a column might look like this, (an excerpt from one of the articles by my cousin Karen in the old Tustinaire):

With the greater//
knowledge of the world,/
the demands for wider//
courses of study in our/

high schools are ever//

When that text was transferred by cutting out the article and pasting it back in the position it would appear on a page in the newspaper, the person who typed the copy on mimeograph stencils had a guide to follow. For each slash that indicated spacing that would equal our column width, the typist would double the spacing between words or even half space letters if necessary to make the copy come out exactly right. One could also “squeeze” a letter into the space. While the generations of younger people now might scoff at the old manual typewriters and the method of producing a page of text in columns, I must say that we had skills that would not be so easy for today’s students to acquire.

Mostly, the work on *The Tustinaire* was both fun and educational. Occasionally, it was not so much work as it was play dreamed up by some of the more creative workers on the paper. I recall that there was a large cardboard carton with a target painted on one side. It sat on a chair in the paper room. There was also a large butcher knife on the premises. I don’t know what purpose that might have had. Probably, it was just there, left from some previous year. But, sharpened nicely, it worked very well as a throwing knife, and several of the newspaper staff became fairly adept in their skill. Nobody in any position of authority knew about this, as far as I remember, but I am not sure they would have objected.

There was also the matter of the handle of the mimeograph machine. The two boys who usually “ran off” the 200+ copies of each of the pages of the paper once left part of that task to me and my cousin. Some excuse was given for their inability to finished mimeographing. But, when she or I grasped the red handle, it was more red than usual. The boys had covered it with red mimeograph ink.

The only scary thing that ever happened in the paper room that year—at least anything I knew about—took place when a couple of the wiry, athletic farm boys decided to put the editor in the closet under the stairs. They were, apparently, unaware of the fact that I suffered from very extreme claustrophobia. They could not accomplish their objective. Fear of small places and of being locked in made me stronger than these two healthy youths.

So, looking at these old high school papers was interesting on several levels. It might be a worthwhile learning experience for today’s teenagers to try to learn these skills. Their appreciation for the present (and future) technology might extend to include awe at the abilities of people just a couple of generations ago.