

Not goodbye, just see you later  
December 15, 2006

When the Salem Gazette began about 15 months ago, it was a mere thought, an idea, half whispered by a few. We didn't know how the community would react. Would they discount a second newspaper in Salem or embrace the concept?

Bill Woolley and I not only wrote the first two issues. We stood at the train station from 5 in the morning and handed out the paper to commuters. The idea was to make this fledgling bit of inspiration into a viable source, something people might come to rely on and expect at the end of their workweek.

Probably the most touching has been the number of columnists who without pay, submit their writing each week on fitness, music, arts, pets, historic preservation and a number of other topics. They often come to us first, believing in the future of the Gazette and reinforcing our belief that we are beginning to play an important role in the community. A recent call for more writers has again elicited a huge response.

To put it simply: We've been welcomed and in fact, overwhelmingly supported.

It's not that I believe the Gazette is much more than a listing of community events and stories about everyday people. It's just that we've also had great timing and been fortunate enough in just over a year to chronicle new leadership on just about every front in this city.

I would like to think the Gazette has also played a role in building a greater sense of community in Salem and helped this city move forward and grow in some very positive ways.

Growth is something that this weary reporter now also seeks. A new path. I've been with Community Newspaper Company for nearly four years (beginning at the North Shore Sunday) and on deadline every week.

My stories (accumulating in laundry baskets at home) have been about the citizens of this city, from the high school students running a mock election to the elderly ladies sharing tales of their brick historic home. I've heard tales from both those down on their luck and on the rise. People tell me things, I try to listen and some of it has ended up in the newspaper.

I've been lucky enough to receive amazing invitations, chat in beautiful settings, celebrate and commemorate with the city's people, and I've also witnessed some unfortunate and sad circumstances. I've listened to stories told at the Salem Mission and interviewed developers coming to town.

Politics, art, development, diversity, history, village life and a city vibe. It's all here.

I've been proud to watch Salem citizens stand in visible places, wave signs and demand peace or quietly speak the names of those killed in war. I've seen others declare "I'm an American too." I've laughed with those who consider themselves on the city's fringe and performed the more expected duties of a reporter, dropping in to see the friendly folks at the mayor's office.

A job where you produce a product that every week is read, scrutinized, criticized and later discussed with you by total strangers and friends alike is a strange experience. Dropping into a store or restaurant becomes talk of work and somehow work and life meld into one until you feel you should be paid for the hours you spend thinking about stories in the shower.

It's a transparent and often surreal existence where you sometimes feel your words and even you become the property of the community. Someone once pitched me a story while I was taking out my garbage. No kidding.

Writing for a community newspaper elevates you somewhere to the level of "expert," according to some, on the goings-on in the blocks that make up our small city. My education has simply been the conversations I've had with people, the various meetings

I've attended and the day-to-day life I've tried to observe. When we pass on the street, I hope we'll still chat. Along the way, I've been fortunate enough to collect a few of you and we've become friends.

I hope I'll always tell stories. I know I won't stop loving Salem. It's been my home for three wonderful years and nothing pleases me more than when people moving here from Boston or afar say they have heard about our beautiful and special city.

Living in Salem is truly a lifestyle. We walk along the cobblestones, bumping into others who enjoy our quirky sense of village life and share our love of beauty — of art, history and old buildings.

As I head home to Missouri for the holidays, each mile westward will take me to a more modern world. I'll pass all kinds of cities and towns with their strip malls, neon signs and large billboards. I'll have to adjust to newer homes and to a greater reliance on cars. You can bet that friends, relatives and even strangers will ask questions to learn more about the mysterious city of Salem. And I'll be sure to tell them for you — No, it's not just a suburb of Boston and yes, we have a whole lot more than witches.