

My history in publishing

The “newspaper” I produced when I was 11 had simpler economics than the *Century* does.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [September 22, 2021](#) issue



The newsroom at the *Crocodile Report* (Photo courtesy of Peter W. Marty)

My first introduction to editing and publishing came when I was 11. It was an inauspicious beginning, to be sure. Short-lived. Ill-conceived. Driven by a combination of ambition, immaturity, and fun.

My brothers and I produced a modest one-page, biweekly “newspaper” called the *Crocodile Report*. Modest is probably too generous a word. *Newspaper* is appropriately inside quotation marks. The name derived from the fact that I could draw a reasonably good crocodile, which landed on the masthead, and because I thought some clever writing would emerge from all the words that rhymed or nearly rhymed with *croc* and *dile*.

If truth be told, the writing was lousy. We printed inane weather reports, corny jokes, made-up stories, pitiful limericks, and recipes that consisted of whatever foods preteen boys thought would taste funny when mixed together. Stanley, an exchange

student brother pictured with me, and another brother contributed free copy. I pounded out the three-column design on a green Olivetti typewriter, typographically justifying the margins wherever I could by counting out spaces for the individual letters.

The business plan was slick. I talked my fifth-grade teacher into providing free ditto master sheets that she then ran through the staff ditto machine after school. She never charged me for the paper. The intoxicating smell of the purple ink, familiar to every grade-schooler's nose at the time, made all the typing labors seem worthwhile. Students in the two fifth-grade classes lapped up the *Crocodile Report* for five cents apiece, sniffing the ink as they paid. The economics worked well. My pockets filled up.

Fast-forward to current times at the *Christian Century*. Good writing is what we're known for, and the copy doesn't come free. The quality of critical thinking, imaginative discourse, and often field-defining ideas make the *Century* the go-to magazine for religion and public life in America. The economics are much tougher than with the *Crocodile Report*. In an online world, people don't expect to pay for news and commentary they believe should be free. Our pockets are not overflowing.

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