

Mama, why are there newspapers?

Our sons and I commute together every day, so we cover a lot of conversational ground as we drive.

One day I realized Leo had been sitting quietly without his usual stream of conversation. Then he spoke up.

“Mama,” he asked, “why are there newspapers?”

Um.

Well.

That should be an easy one, right?

He wasn’t asking about death or heaven—a hot topic for our almost 5-year-old.

And he wasn’t asking why God makes everyone begin life as a baby or why boys don’t wear skirts—two questions I’ve tackled, one with more success than the other.

But this time I was stumped.

I know why newspapers were invented, certainly. And I know why we had them when I was Leo’s age. In fact, newspapers have been an important part of my life.

Several years ago, I worked as a newspaper carrier for *The Evening Sun*. I delivered newspapers in Rodgers Forge with pride, reading snatches of the front page as I slipped the newspapers into people’s doors.



The newspaper became my hobby in high school, then my passion in college, and I worked as a newspaper reporter for five years in my first two jobs. Even after I moved into the public relations field, I continued to love news and terrific stories—and I still do.

But although Leo and Daniel enjoy picking up the newspapers from their

grandparents' driveway, they have never known what it's like to have a newspaper land on their front steps in a plastic bag. And they probably never will.

The conversation reminded me of a mock story I read in *The Onion* this summer that said that Superman fans say the most unrealistic aspect of the comic books is that the *Daily Planet* newspaper is still relevant and financially viable.



For our older son who knows the computer as the source of almost all information—except for traffic reports, which come on the radio—it was a natural question to ask. And I didn't have a good answer.

I really didn't know what to tell Leo. And he waited patiently while I considered—and mentally discarded—possible answers.

Finally I said, "Well, some people read their news on the computer, some people get it by watching TV, some listen to the radio, and other people like to sit down and read a newspaper."



Leo seemed satisfied with that. But I will readily acknowledge that it was a feeble answer, and it made newspapers sound a bit like pistachio ice cream.

A few days later we were commuting together again when we saw a satellite TV truck. We started talking about satellites, which is even less in my area of expertise. I mentioned that we wouldn't have GPS (global positioning system) without satellites, and that it was a fairly new invention.

"Mama!" Leo said—and I heard the astonishment in his voice before he even got to his question. "When you were a little girl, there wasn't even GPS?"

"No, there wasn't," I said.

Of course, way back then, I thought, we didn't need GPS. We just hitched the horses to our covered wagon and sat back and read our newspapers by the light of the stars.

Newspaper photos by Treasa Beyer. The Daily Planet photo was taken by the blogger at Geppi's Entertainment Museum.