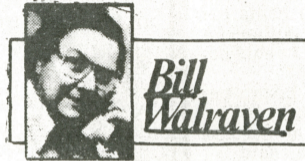


Is journalism any more than glowering and scowling?

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Every so often one of the high schools sends students out to "shadow" people in various professions.

After observing and following their chosen subject around all day, they return to school and write a report, possibly to help them determine if the job is what they had in mind for the future.

I have been such a subject a couple of times. The little girl who came to the office didn't have very much to observe. What can you say about a subject who sits and frowns at a video display terminal, muttering and sometimes giggling to himself?

That day I received a letter that almost wrote the column for me. Three or four telephone calls for background information and I was in business. The actual writing only took a few minutes. "Is that all there is to it?" she asked.

Well, sometimes I have to talk to the

machine a lot more. Take the time someone tripped over the cord behind the terminal and destroyed the column I had just finished. That would not have been a good day at all to have a high school girl shadowing my every move.

She asked enough questions to salvage her report, but she was disappointed. All a columnist does is sit there, glower and punch keys.

The word must have gotten around. I didn't have another shadow for several years. Then another one cropped up last year.

I vowed I would let her know a columnist could still be a reporter. Of course this required that I be at work at an awfully early hour.

So I picked her up and took her to lunch.

Then we went to the beach where I

wanted to inspect the pavilion at the National Seashore.

It was a nice day. I talked to Seashore people and we trudged around the sand while I snapped a few pictures of the cracking concrete.

It was a weekday and not many people were about, a nice time to be at the beach because everybody else was in school.

I came back by the condominiums and took pictures of a crowd of college

students with an offshore drilling rig in the background.

I made a couple more stops for possible column material and headed for the office. She asked questions about the job and made notes.

"Would you like to go back to the office and watch me write this up?" I asked.

She asked the time. It was almost 3:30 p.m.

"Naw," she said. "By the time we get back to town, it will be time for school to be out. Just drop me off at home."

I think that girl is temperamentally suited for this type of work. I don't think she will ever bow to deadline pressure.

But I'm afraid she has a distorted image of what this job is about. She might go to journalism school just so she can go out and loaf on the beach while other

people are back in town scowling and glowering at a video screen.

Next time maybe I'll take a quick trip for material, return to the office and let my shadow have a crack at writing it. But that could have drawbacks, too.

The shadow might like it.

I don't know how to answer young people interested in this business. Watergate reporters Woodward and Bernstein triggered a stampede of talented people into reporting. Most were disappointed at the pay and advancement prospects.

Now there are not so many. A professor once asked me to tell his class what their future in journalism could be.

"Learn how to repair computers," I advised.

He never spoke to me again.

Maybe I'll just keep on glowering and scowling.