

# My personal clipping service and so much more

Two envelopes arrived from my father today.

I say envelopes because they weren't cards and they weren't letters. They were envelopes. Envelopes stuffed with newspaper clippings.

This is how my father communicates with me.

Since I was 12 years old, my father has cut stories out of the newspaper and left them somewhere for me to read.

When I was 12, they were usually Dear Abby and usually about boys. As I got older the stories were about more serious issues like drinking and driving.

When I left home, the clippings kept coming.

Sometimes they would be sad — an obituary of a distant relative or a teacher he had, maybe a parent of someone I grew up with. Sometimes they would be funny — a photo of a cat and dog snuggling or a story about a would-be burglar who got stuck in an air vent and



**Christine  
Steele**  
In Our  
Own Words

had to be rescued by police.

Often they would be about history — a story about an old sailing ship from a Massachusetts seafaring town, a Boston typewriter company going out of business or a historical house about to be torn down.

They used to annoy me. His clippings. They would arrive with no note, no letter, sometimes just a few lines scribbled in the margin.

"Your great grandfather Edward Steele carved the granite sign on this school," he would write, drawing an arrow pointing to the sign in the picture.

Or, "Ha, Ha, What do they think they have we all want to see?" next to a story about a man exposing himself.

The clippings would pile up on

my kitchen table and I wished he would just write me a letter instead of burdening me with all these little pieces of paper with tiny scraps of information.

The further I moved away from home, the more I began to value those clippings. I started to understand. Across the miles we could still share a laugh or a smile over some fuzzy animal photo or dumb crook story.

I would think of my dad as I sat at my kitchen table unfolding each clipping. Reading each story. These were his words.

He was never much with words, my dad. "Not good at that," my mom would explain. And since my father and I didn't agree on much of anything when I was growing up, most conversations quickly became arguments.

Things aren't much different today. But these clippings were a way he could share something with me without us fighting.

My father is not a college-educat-

ed man. He worked a blue-collar job his whole life. But through his clippings I have learned many things.

I learned about my family's history — Swedish immigrants who worked the granite quarries and the shipyards of Quincy, Mass.

I learned about history, pirate ships, buried treasure and the famous presidents from his hometown of Quincy, Mass.

I learned about the dangers of growing up in a less innocent world. About dating, driving fast, staying out late.

I learned about encouragement when a story would arrive about a famous author or some woman who just published her first book.

"See, you could do this!" scribbled above the headline.

I learned about love.

I learned about life.

I wonder what it will be like when the clippings stop coming.

*Christine Steele is the Reporter-Herald's business reporter.*