

# A childhood spent delivering newspapers around Winnetka inspired author's latest book

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A little spending money and possibly a taste of independence. That's what 7-year-old Gary D. Cole craved.

He found his solution with a newspaper route in his Winnetka neighborhood.

Cole chronicles his years delivering the Chicago Tribune in his new book, "Newsboy: Along My Route in Chicagoland 1968-1975".

In meticulous detail, the North Carolina resident shares stories of the neighborhood where he grew up, the interesting people he met while delivering newspapers and the things he learned from the pages of those papers.

Cole said writing the book "came from a place of great pain."

He was a practicing attorney when, at the age of 40, Cole had what he called "a midlife crisis." He left his law partnership to create a "theater on video" company.

"This was five years before YouTube came along and sadly it didn't work out," Cole said. "What was supposed to redeem me was a government job with the National Endowment for the Arts and that blew up in my face as well. I had two young kids at home and I was at

my wit's end. I took refuge in these memories about my customers from my childhood. It proved therapeutic.”

That was in 2003.

He was able to remember so many details about those long-ago years because, he said, “I kind of transported my brain to a distant time which really helped me deal with the pain I was experiencing,” he explained. “The memories were incredibly vivid. This was my street and my customers and my route.”



Gary D. Cole is pictured in sixth grade. His latest book was inspired by his time delivering papers around Winnetka as a child. (Cole family photo / HANDOUT)

He worked on the book sporadically, completing two other books before he finished this one — a novel called “Black Box,” which revolved

around a theater company Cole started in Portland, Oregon, and a memoir called “Artless.”

After the disappointments of his art endeavors, Cole returned to practicing law. He retired at the end of last year, which gave him more time to complete “Newsboy.”

In the pages, the author shares his love of sports and his interest in politics, which was nurtured by reading the papers that he delivered. It exposed him to the events of the world.

Part of his route kept Cole indoors delivering papers to the primarily elderly residents of a building called the Chimney Apartments.

“I sort of had surrogate grandparents that I was introduced to from my route,” he recalled. His parents appreciated the fact that “I had supportive neighbors who I could go in and visit.”

Cole had more contact with the neighbors when the Tribune changed the function of the newsboys. When Cole first started, newspapers would be dropped off for him and he would deliver them and then collect his pay at a local news agency. The new method had the newsboys buying the papers from the news agency and collecting marked up payments from their customers.

In addition to being a valuable learning experience, being a newsboy turned out to be a profitable venture.

“I got a stereo. I bought a sailboat. I joined the Columbia Record Club,” he said.

One thing that Cole loved about his work as a newsboy was that “I was on my own,” he said. “I really enjoyed the independence of being a paperboy.”

The author praised the skills he acquired that helped him later in life. “It made me a better listener,” he noted. “I went on to become an entrepreneur in a number of different areas — mostly in the arts — and I think having that sort of entrepreneurial background was very helpful.”

In addition, Cole concluded, “I felt I had to understand the news that I was delivering to my customers. That responsibility sparked that interest at a very young age.”

“Newsboy” went on sale at the Book Stall in Winnetka, 811 Elm St., last month. For information, call 847-446-8979 or visit [thebookstall.com](http://thebookstall.com). It will later be available at other local bookstores.

Cole is donating sales of his book for the first six months to the Chicago Headline Club in honor of late Tribune columnist Mike Royko. *Myrna Petlicki is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.*