

The Middlesbury Star

by Chris Rose



Middlesbury was a town that was as boring as its name. That's what Joe thought, anyway, and he had lived there for 12 years, all of his life in fact, so he was an expert on Middlesbury. And it was boring. The place was so boring that it didn't even have its own newspaper, said Joe.

"There's no need for a newspaper here" said Joe's sister.

"Why?" asked Joe. "Every town has its own local paper."

"The problem is" replied his sister, "is that nothing happens here. That's why there's no newspaper. Middlesbury is just too boring to have a newspaper."

"That's not true!" said Joe. "Lots of things happen here...."

"Such as?"

"Well, erm... there's a rising amount of crime...that's something to read about..."

"Rising amount of crime?" said his sister. "You mean somebody stole a bag of sweets from the local shop? Rubbish! Anyway, everything is available on the internet now." Joe's sister looked at Joe with that look that she always gave him. "There's no need for a newspaper." She wanted to make him feel stupid, as always. "You can find anything you want on the net. Nobody needs a local newspaper anymore."

Joe's sister was older than him and always seemed to know more about everything than Joe did. At least she said she always knew more about everything than Joe did.

Joe, however, was starting to think that perhaps his sister wasn't always right. Sometimes,

thought Joe, his sister didn't know everything. He decided to show her that she was wrong.

Joe had a paper round. Every morning he went to the newspaper shop, picked up a big bag of newspapers, and delivered them to people who lived nearby. Joe was certain that his sister was wrong; he knew that lots of people still read newspapers because he knew how heavy they were! Joe also knew that there were people like Mr Phelps who was so old that he didn't have a computer at all, and Mrs Smithers, who wasn't quite as old as Mr Phelps, but her daughter had bought a computer with an internet connection for her so that they could stay in touch more easily, but Mrs Smithers never learned how to use the computer, so she still telephoned her daughter, or wrote old-fashioned letters to her. Mrs Smithers would love a local paper, thought Joe.

So the next morning Joe sat in his bedroom and tried to design the front page of a new local paper for Middlesbury. He even had a name for the paper already: "The Middlesbury Star". Brilliant! thought Joe. It sounds exciting, everyone will love it. Now all he had to do was think of at least six or seven stories, write them out, print them off and photocopy them and he could take them to the newspaper shop and sell them there for at least 50p each. Not only would he produce Middlesbury's first ever local newspaper, he would also get rich as well!

However, Joe soon found he had a problem. He looked at the words "Middlesbury Star" at the top of the page, and saw only a white space under it. What his sister had said was true: there was nothing to write about. He sat there for ages and tried to think of some news. He thought about Mr Johnson who lived next door. Somebody had scratched his car last week. There was a story! Joe wrote the headline in big letters: "VANDALISM HITS MIDDLESBURY!" Then he didn't know what to write next. He decided to interview Mr Johnson.

"Well" said Mr Johnson. "Nothing much happened really. I just woke up one morning and somebody had scratched the side of my car." "Do you have any idea who did it?" asked Joe.

“Not really” said Mr Johnson. “It was probably just an accident.” This, Joe realised, wasn’t much of a story.

“Your problem is” said his sister when he told her, “is that you are waiting for a story to come to you. It’s not like that. You have to go out and find a story!!!!”. Joe thought about what she said, got on his bike and went out into the town, looking for news. A tree in the park was falling down. The old butcher’s shop in the town centre was closing down. Somebody new was moving into the big house at the end of their street. The supermarket had a special offer on microwave-ready meals. Even Joe realised that there wasn’t much news here.

He sat down again in front of his computer and wrote a new headline:

“NOTHING HAS HAPPENED!”

It looked good. One thing was missing. Under the headline, in smaller letters, he wrote:

By Joe Barnes.

Perfect. He wanted to show everybody what a good reporter he was – his sister above all.

And there it was, the front page of the first edition of the Middlesbury Star. It looked great, thought Joe. He printed it off, then ran to the photocopy shop and made 100 copies. The next morning he took all the copies with him to the newspaper shop. He asked Mr Williams in the shop if he would sell them. Mr Williams looked at the Middlesbury Star and laughed.

“Certainly!” he said. “Everybody will love this!”

One day later, every single copy of the first edition of the Middlesbury Star had sold out. Joe was very, very happy. He was going to copy some more when the phone rang. It was the BBC.

“Hello, can we speak to the editor of the Middlesbury Star please?”

“Yes, this is me. Joe Barnes.”

“Joe – we’d like to offer you a job...”

Over the next few days Joe got phone calls from CNN and al-Jazeera, from Reuters and France Press and lots of other press agencies and networks.

“We need a young reporter!” they said.

“We admire the truthfulness of your writing!” they said.

“We like your direct style!” they said.

The BBC wanted to send Joe to Beijing. CNN wanted him to work in Washington. Al-Jazeera wanted him in Qatar.

“No!” said Joe. “I want to work in Middlesbury!”

“But nothing happens in Middlesbury!” they said.

“Exactly” said Joe. “That’s why I like it...”