

The Cross in the Crossword

It seems that nearly every newspaper — written or on-line — provides some recreational activity that is both entertaining and provoking.

Crossword puzzles continue to fascinate and frustrate with levels of difficulty that challenge and reward. And after Arthur Wynn (or “Wynne”) composed the first puzzle more than 100 years ago, new ones get written every day, for adults, children and snobs who quietly take pride in their spelling accuracy and trivia knowledge.

USA Today’s degree of difficulty increases throughout the week. The editors must feel that our brains need to ease into each week’s intellectual demands after a week-end’s rest. The revered and reviled *New York Times* began its version in 1942 after previously describing the activity as cheap trivialization of intellectual capabilities, and, with the *Chicago Tribune* and *Wall Street Journal*, now offer versions that vary in degrees of difficulty and frustration, taxing the skills and patience of week-end word warriors.

Solvers are faced with daily dilemmas:

- Pen or pencil. The pencil provides an opportunity to erase what’s wrong and replace with a correct answer. The pen signals an air of confidence and also encourages thought and foresight before answering.

- Artificial perfection: get the first horizontal word correct and connect off of it until the entire puzzle is solved without ever having to skip a word.

- Proceed vertically or horizontally. Going from last to first starting with the vertical provides a little bit of rebellion over

Charitably Speaking



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morning coffee.

Each crossword has spaces not to be filled. For the purist, the true crossword should have the same structure from the top left compared to the bottom right; top right

to bottom left. Long answers on one half of the page (whether folded length-wise or width wise) will be mirror reflective.

And if we think of the difficulty in answering the obscure clues with obscure answers, we should thank the author for creating these puzzles day after day, week after week, or both. No vacations are ever announced for the authors.

Combine all of these challenges and it sounds a bit like Lent and Easter. Every year we are provided with the humility of the eraser of confession, think Be Reconciled, and the confidence of a red felt pen, think “Alleluia, He is Risen.” The available accuracy of a dictionary and thesaurus, combines with the subtle pressure of a (life) time for achievement.

We may not be able to complete the entire puzzle all at once just as we cannot complete Lent in one day. What we can do, however, is welcome a new puzzle every day, sometimes with difficulty, knowing that the author has placed what we need before us, namely every answer to every question. Some days we may need a pencil with an eraser, other days that red felt tip works just fine.

Even though some of the clues of Lent or the crossword may be mysterious and require help from a family member or friend, we can access them, use them, and accept the day’s mystery. And then we can do it all over again tomorrow.

Anyone for Sudoku?

