

Henry's Big Break

My great-grandfather, Henry A. Benson, is the most famous person in our family. He rose from delivering newspapers in his small hometown of Cross Plains, Texas, to becoming the editor in chief of one of the biggest papers in the state. He tells many stories about his days as a reporter, but his favorite one takes place on a late spring afternoon in 1941. That's the day Great-granddad got his big break.

Inside the offices of the *Center State Chronicle*, 15-year-old Henry took a deep breath. The warm air of the print room filled his lungs, and the smell of hot ink lingered in his nose. He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his worn-out jeans so the paper's editor, Mr. Walsh, wouldn't see how nervous he felt.

"Mr. Walsh," Henry said, "I've delivered your paper for three years now. I've never missed one day. If you make me a reporter, I won't let you down."

"Henry," Mr. Walsh replied, "there's a big difference between being a delivery boy and being a reporter. Maybe after you've finished school."

Trying not to let his disappointment show, Henry left the newspaper office. What was he going to do? The paper route just didn't earn him enough money to help his mom. He got his battered bicycle and pedaled across town toward home.

Near an old bridge, Henry saw skid marks on the pavement. Tire tracks showed where a car had recently left the road. Henry spotted a sedan lying at the bottom of the ravine.

Henry flagged down a passing car to fetch an ambulance. Then he scrambled down the ravine. The car's right front tire was shredded, which must have been why the car ran off the road. The driver lay slumped over the

steering wheel. He was a middle-aged man wearing a rumpled brown suit. A dark bruise marked the driver's forehead.

"Are you all right?" Henry asked the man.

". . . Can't move my right arm," the driver mumbled.

Henry opened the car door and took a look. He tried not to let the man see how scared he felt. "It looks broken," Henry said. "I'll do what I can to help until the ambulance gets here."

Henry tried to talk to the injured man to keep him awake, but the man passed out anyway. Henry understood the seriousness of the situation and stayed with the man until an ambulance came. Only when the man was safely on his way to the hospital did it occur to Henry that the accident was newsworthy. Maybe this was the story that could make him a real reporter!

He raced home and typed up an account of the accident. Then he pedaled as fast as he could back to the *Chronicle* offices. Editor Walsh ran the story and began to realize that Henry had the right stuff to become a reporter.

In the years that followed, my great-grandfather learned to be a great reporter. Later, he became one of the most respected newspaper editors in Texas. No matter how famous he became, though, he always loved to tell about the day he got his big break. His story still inspires me whenever I think about what kind of job I would really love.