

Why we're printing a fictionalized serial

We're trying something different in the Post starting today. Something that newspapers haven't done in decades. We're presenting a serialized novel about our town, Palo Alto.

Palo Alto and the mid-Peninsula are going through tumultuous changes right now. Growing tech companies



Dave Price

have created hordes of 20-something millionaires who are creating the Next New Thing in downtown coffee shops. Old, familiar landmarks are giving way to new glass box buildings. Housing prices have shot up, and the new residents in

town are pushing out the old-timers. Middle-class families are struggling to survive, and many are moving. The pressure is getting to everybody, especially the young.

Newspapers traditionally have had two platforms to tell big stories like this: straight news coverage and the opinion page, where everyone gives their perspective on these changes.

What I hope to accomplish with this serialized novel, called Palo Alto Odyssey, is to create a third platform for discussing what's happening to Palo Alto. And do it in a way that's entertaining and thought-provoking.

An old idea

Serialized novels have been around for a long time, going back to Charles Dickens and "The Pickwick Papers" in the 1830s. For decades, such novels were a staple in daily newspapers, fading away in the 1940s.

Then, in the late 1970s, the San Francisco Chronicle published "Tales of the City" by Armistead Maupin, a newspaper reporter turned novelist. The series became a novel, film and musical.

When I began thinking about bringing this concept to the Post, the first thing I realized is that we needed a writer. Maybe a local novelist or playwright who had a solid understanding of what was happening in Palo Alto. Not just the politics and business aspects of the change, but how all of this was affecting us socially. The difficul-

ties families were facing and what this was doing to our relationships.

I asked John Angell Grant, our longtime theater critic, for help finding a writer. After hearing my idea, his first response was, "I'd like to take a crack at this."

Grant, the author of 12 produced stage plays and years of drama criticism, was a terrific choice. We had a lot of fun collaborating together. Collaborating meant that I threw out crazy stories I had heard over the years in Palo Alto, and he wrote



GRANT

the serial. Some were news stories we published and others were wild rumors we were never able to confirm for publication. You'll probably recognize some of the people in this series, though their names were changed.

Based on real events

There will be things in these stories that actually happened to me or John, like when the panhandler was asking

me for money and his cellphone went off, and he had to interrupt his pitch.

We had a lot of laughs brainstorming the ideas for this series, but it's not a stupid April Fool's Day story. We want to have a real conversation about what's happening here, and a fictionalized serial is another way of accomplishing that.

We kept each day's episode short — 400 to 500 words — so that you could read it over a cup of coffee. John is using the cliffhanger technique to get people to pick up the next day's installment. And there will be some repetition from day to day. Bear with us. We want people to start reading this from Day 1, but realistically it might take a while for people to get into the habit. Our intention is that somebody could start reading on, say, Day 10 and still get into the story.

It's an experiment. Let me know what you think.

Editor Dave Price's column usually appears in Monday's Daily Post. His email address is price@padailypost.com.