

Mike Royko

I picked up a book at the library the other day, one of those old ones they sell for a buck apiece. It was a compilation of newspaper columns by Mike Royko, who wrote for a series of Chicago newspapers, and was ultimately syndicated in over 500 papers. One of the Chicago papers he wrote for was acquired by the Rupert Murdoch empire, prompting him to write that “no self respecting fish would allow itself to be wrapped in a Murdoch paper.” Royko died in 2007, and most of the columns in the book were written in the early to mid 1980’s. That’s twenty-five years ago for the mathematically challenged.

The thing is, in these columns, he’s raving about the same damn things we’re raving about today. It’s very depressing. Remember Yassar Arafat, the PLO guy who somehow never grew a beard but always had a five day rash of unkempt whiskers? He must have started a trend because on July 28, 1985, Royko writes about the “stubble beard”, apparently a fashion statement at the time, and razors specially constructed to maintain that look. It’s still with us and I cannot figure it’s appeal. I see male models in advertisements sporting this look, schmoozing attractive ladies. My experience says that my wife will tell me it’s like cozying up to heavy grit sandpaper, it hurts, leaves a rash, and she’ll have nothing to do with the look.

Royko complains bitterly about celebrities who publicize their “love children”, their visits to sanitariums to dry out, or who write books portraying in loathsome detail their love lives over the years. I can’t see that any of this has changed, unless it for the worse, because now this sharing of unwanted intimacy now occurs live and in color on TV as well as in books and magazines. .

He tries exercise. First with a very cool racing bicycle complete with goofy bike suit. When the bike broke, he attempted a complex exercise machine. When he pulled a number of important muscles, he tried jogging. When his knees cracked like porcelain tea cups, he attempted walking. When his hips gave out, he gave up. Has anything changed? I don’t think so. I haven’t tried all these things, nor will I, preferring a comfortable corpulence, but there is no shortage of humans willing to try them.

He raves on December 7, 1987, (my wedding anniversary by the way) about Wall Street and the avaricious, conscienceless stock brokers who rip off unwary investors, then when the market turns unpleasant, begin “pitiful moaning while standing in pools of sweat. ” Sound familiar twenty years later?

Government bureaucracy drives him mad. He writes of a guy who took a job as a busboy and quit after two weeks, which was the time he needed to research

where the money was kept and when it would be deposited, then returned with two friends and robbed the place. Later, the owner of the restaurant received a form from the government requesting proof of employment of the robber. He was out on bail and had applied for unemployment insurance! The government office declared it was simply their business to ascertain his employment. It was beyond their purview to establish why he might have left. Does this ring a bell today?

He talks about public TV and how the stations spend most of the time harassing viewers for money, talking about how good the last show was, or talking about how good the next show is going to be. Here, something has changed but not for the better. Today, the virus has spread to the major private networks, who, apparently unable to fill air time with advertisements, now fill it with the previews of exciting new shows which will air months from now. I even heard them touting an “encore premiere performance,” which I guess is the opening of a new show which has already opened at least once.

I could go on. It’s depressing to find that, really, *nothing has changed*. I write little articles for the Mirror complaining about this and that, with far less erudition and impact than Mike Royko. The passage of time shows what he accomplished. Nothing! Look what I’ve accomplished. Somewhat less than nothing! I think I’ll take the

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