

2 0 1 1 S P R I N G E D I T I O N

THE REAL NEWS

Illustration by Ski

THIRTY ONE years is a long time doing anything. But this issue continues the therapeutic rants, commentary, opinions and editorial cartoons of Our Times.

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MYTHS & MISTAKES

THE FROZEN CHOSEN

WHO WILL TURN OUT THE LIGHT?

THE UNLIKEABLE CUBS

Since 1980, there has been an acorn in the forest of reason that has now been buried by the vast tonnage of information in the mixed media of the Digital Age for some reason continues to be published at the whim of the publisher, Ski.

✧ Myths & Mistakes ✧

“You cannot back up on the Expressway,” said Ski one evening in a quiet Chicago bar. Advice for any situation. An expression of reasonable expected behavior while wildly speeding forward in a crowded highway called Life. A cookie before digital cookies were invented by Internet coders intent of spying on one’s surf habits. Bad habits, indeed.



As One gets older, one finds that age does indeed impart cynical wisdom. If one was born with a harsh dose of satire and cynical leanings, age can be the mental jackhammer constantly pounding the craziness of daily life into mind numbing mush.

Example, during my lifetime almost half of my state governors have been indicted on corruption charges. It was one of the first “myths” of childhood that was easily broken: public officials are serving the public’s interest. It was a mistake to fully trust those who would turn public service into a personal careers and feudal crony states. With the knowledge that politicians are merely selling themselves as their fore-bearer snake oil salesmen did generations before, voting becomes a chore because no matter the choices, all the choices seem ripe with distrust.

It is no longer a democracy when people no longer have viable choices. I have said for decades that there is no difference between Republicans and Democrats. They are both career politicians, trading votes for campaign donations and exempted perks at taxpayers expense. Our leaders are so out of touch with the average American that they could legislate a national cookie baking day, and mandate that all the cookies so baked must be sent to Congress, leaving only crumbs for constituents.

It sounds crazy, but the reality is that the federal leadership is so empowered they can freely admit they don’t read the bills that they are passing into law. They really don’t care about the consequences of their actions beyond the nightly 15 second sound bite. Arrogant stubbornness breeds no accountability for them.

A corollary to the career politician myth is that the best and brightest are drawn to the call of public service. They may have Ivy League degrees and successful family legacies, but by in large, American leadership is a pretty dense bunch of dullards. Since no one questions their knowledge or credentials on any given subject, they ride a carpet of superiority into their cushy offices. The rule of law which they make rarely even applies to them. The sacrifices they demand of the people are never taken away from them. Hell, some don’t even pay their income taxes like Rep. Rangel, who instead of going to jail like an average convicted or admitted tax cheat, he got a wrist slap by his colleagues.

It is a mistake to trust those in power with our own personal best interests.

✧ The Frozen Chosen ✧

One thing you can trust is the weather; it will change. Global warming my \$#%@! Mother Nature ripped through the Midwest dropping 22 inches of snow in Chicago metro area. Crime took a holiday as the snow put the area on lock down. It took two days to shovel out mountains of snow.



Early in the Blizzard of 2011, several accidents on North Lake Shore Drive caused the traffic to turn into a frozen parking lot. The high winds and heavy snow fall crippled any attempt to try to unclog LSD. Hours passed and cars were entombed with heavy lake effect snow and wind blown ice off Lake Michigan. Some drivers were stuck in their vehicles for more than 8 hours.

Neighborhood residents were the only rescue crews. A few brought food and hot thermos to the trapped passengers. Some opened their homes for them. It was only hours later when police and fire crews could meander through the carnage to bring people out to tell them to abandon their vehicles to the elements.

The kindness of strangers in times of emergency is an overlooked trait of the American spirit. In a massive winter storm, neighbors helping neighbors shovel out their drives. Strangers stopping from their icy routes to help push an unlucky fellow traveller from a snow drift. Entire blocks after the storm, refusing to wait for city crews to plow side streets, took it upon themselves to clean their block one shovel full at a time.

People will work to the extreme under tough conditions. Snow plow crews spent two days of pushing snow from association drives well into the early morning hours under Arctic conditions. A strong work ethic is another lost trait of America

that at times suddenly reappears in harsh conditions. When called upon, Americans will get dirty to get a tough job done. That is why foreign leaders always underestimate the US when it comes to military foreign policy. Why would the American people stand for troops keeping the peace in desolate areas of the planet?

It is one of the great untapped resources of the US: human capital. While some workers will brave 12 hours of subzero cold to move snow, some in the unemployment lines still find such labor beneath them. More than 8 million workers have fallen off the unemployment roles. Large US corporations have displaced a significant amount of human capital .

✧ Who Will Turn off the Light? ✧

In the midst of a two year recession, the government's labor statistics have finally reached the peak of confusion. A minimum increase in new jobs drops the over all rate to 9 percent was laughed off by the experts. It is more than 10 percent but politics cloud truth.

There are many people who have been out of work for more than two years. They are scraping by the charity of friends and family members.

That is another forgotten trait of the American spirit. The vast majority of Americans are very community oriented and support local charities to an under-appreciated official government agencies.

The solution to most society's ills has been government intervention. That means creation of another bureaucracy funded by millions to billions of tax dollars, which are diverted from the personal budgets of individuals which includes charity donations. Direct donations by individuals have more impact than any

government program. But elected officials will never admit that fact. It would diminish their importance.

If you do simple math calculations for the government stimulus projects, the average "job creation" costs the taxpayers more than \$300,000. But the workers may be only hired at 10 percent of that amount. The inefficiency breeds destruction in the system because it is unsustainable to throw \$300,000 to create a \$30,000 job.

The US could bolster employment prospects within its borders if it took swift action to make fair trade fair. Increase tariffs on imports to off-set wage differences overseas. That was

how the entire federal government was supposed to be funded as designed by the Constitutional framers.

Instead of blindly giving tax breaks and grants to businesses, government regulators need to let the private sector's productivity toward profitability create new jobs organically instead of chemically enhanced by printing more Treasury dollars.

As an expert in China told me, the Chinese people want Western goods. They refuse to buy local products because they know of the quality problems. Twenty years ago US plants migrated to Mexico, only to find quality issues made re-work a new niche business here.



There continues to be a myth that there is a shortage of business leaders that can captain American industry. A look at the current titans of industry that actually creates products are college dropout entrepreneurs and not the Wall Street alchemists printing toxic paper and calling it gold.

The other myth is that the backbone of the American economy is the Fortune 500 companies. But those large enterprises rarely pay federal income taxes due to write-offs, credits, and foreign tax credits. In fact, most large companies are now reporting more than 50% of the revenue is coming from overseas markets. The truth is that the American economy's foundation is in the small business operators that manufacture, assemble, distribute or service consumer products.

Many new small business owners have found themselves creating their own paychecks after having been displaced from corporate America. Downsized. Their positions outsourced to second world nations. Their careers were lost in the constant re-structuring by boards more focused on

compensation goals than the actual health of their own corporations.

Nothing is more exacting of that point than a major firm going bankrupt. The Tribune has been wallowing in Chapter 11 for years. More than \$200 million has been spent on attorneys, accountants, expert and administration fees. But the case is no closer to resolution than from day one. The company spent a fortune arguing about getting executives more bonuses during the bankruptcy proceeding. For the same executives who ran the company into the ground need additional money in order to be retained during the company's trying period. Yes, at times, everything defies common sense.

Common sense is a commodity that is getting as hard to find as rare earth metals. Like intelligence, it must be finite. World population growth and increased education has diluted the resource. It may come to a time where the whole economy nose dives into a real, deep Depression. But there may be no one left in the hallowed halls of the HQ who knows how to turn off the lights.

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✧ The Unlike-able Cubs ✧

There are people that are born with the burden of irrational misery. Cubs fans are charter members of this loathsome lot. Like a well worn, torn, ratty pair of blue jeans, Cub fans will not toss those blues into the trash even though it is wearing thin. Sentimentality. Doom.

It is a mistake to trust those in power with our own personal best interests. Oh, Northside Mudville thought the deep pocket Tribune could salvage the Cub franchise from the clutches of the cheap Wrigley family. It would only take a fresh influx of cash on players and the near century of curses would be lifted. All hail the White Knight,

That Knight turned out to be Ted Knight. The motive was simple: the Cubs were cheap entertainment for the Tribune's broadcasting outlets. If they were "competitive" then the ratings would be good. The lovable losers persona was a marketing strategy. Then hire a beer hawker in Harry Carey, the Tribune turned into the city's largest tavern operator. Wrigley Field, the cathedral of baseball,

turned into a yuppie bleacher bar.

But Cub fans took the changes with even temperament. Things HAD to get better. It could not get worse, right? Right?!

It seemed things turned the corner in 1984 until the Orwellian turn of a ball going under Leon Durham's glove. Despite the future setbacks, the team fielded like-able players: Buckner, Sandberg, Grace, Sarge Matthews, Maddux, Dawson as well as more than a few marginal, well-meaning, out-of-place players that would frustrate fans. But even those players were Our Goofs.

It may have been the platitudes and fan attitudes that allowed the lovable Cubs to only achieve a certain amount of success. But over time, the tide slowly turned; groans turned into curses, and curses turned into expectations.

It was something that the Tribune entertainment bean counters failed to realize. As long as the brand was a cash cow, it was to milked until dry. All that mattered was having a few stars for each season's production, and the team would draw 3 million fans.

Five outs from a World Series had nothing to do with a foul ball into the left field stands. It had to do with the players screwing up Game 6 against the Marlins, the manager screwing up in Games 6 and 7 and then the lasting bitterness of what could have been with that team.

Fans could not wait for the stewardship of the Tribune to end. Prices had been going up and the team was stagnating in a country club setting. Fans would appreciate a player's hustle and baseball IQ. But for the past few seasons, it became apparent that many Cubs were not trying or just going through the motions while sitting on fat, no trade contracts.

A new owner would change things. But Tom Ricketts did no independent due diligence with his own team of baseball experts. He took the Zell deal hook, line and sinker. He overpaid, underestimated the Tribune management, and had no clue on how to run a major league team. In some ways, we are back to a Wrigley family era. But instead of selling gum, we are chewing on the fat back of un-fundamental baseball played by unlike-able players who don't appreciate fans.

Illustration
by Ski



✕ Statues in the Desert ✕

The last original Internet addresses have been allocated across the global service providers. A total of 4.3 billion web addresses have been used up by the net. With all the vastness of the Internet space, and the gross tonnage of information, we are so overwhelmed that content is merely statues in the desert.

There are three types of Internet users: pure surfers, content providers and cybernomads, who wander the net for greener pasture of interconnectivity that the net was supposed to provide them.

Pure surfers are takers; all they want to do is feed off the work of others. The attention span of these readers is short. Content providers are the writers and artists who are uploading thousands of pages of materials for mass consumption but who may never have anyone read their works, let alone appreciate it. The cybernomads are the in-betweeners who will strike out to both provide and take materials from the net, but who are finding things becoming more shallow. They try to find the next great unspoiled corner to interact with other like minds, but are finding these oasis sparse in the sandstorms of junk clogging the web-sphere.

The social networks are not helping develop the net's full potential. The open diaries of blogs have been replaced by the short, impersonal, unfiltered texts or tweets. It is not really deep communication but deep water sonar pings. The last thing these people want to do with their smart phones is to make telephone calls. The art of conversation is a dying art like original screenplays.

The next phase will be to take away the mental process of creating 140 characters to have an autotron sweep the hyper trends and spam friend lists with what you would be thinking about if you had time to think.