

Funny pages a waste of time

Many would-be journalists will wax on and on if you let them about how much they've always loved newspapers.

To hear my fellow reporters tell it, they've been reading newspapers since they were old enough to clutch the pages in their wee, pudgy hands. Ink was in their blood.

"Dear Santa," they would write, fingers wrapped around a fat purple crayon, "please send me a daily subscription to The Philadelphia Inquirer and a Fisher Price typewriter."

Even before they could read, they would crawl onto the the Sunday paper and roll around in the newsprint, gurgling happily.

Not me. Sure, I like newspapers now. But that appreciation for comprehensive news coverage has come with age, maturity and 30 hours of journalism credits.

Before all that, the only part of the paper I read with any regularity was the funny pages. The comics.

My policy was thus: I would read all of the funny strips, all those drawn in silly cartoon style. None of that "Winnie Winkle," "Rex Morgan M.D." crap for me.

Yet I read everything else, even stuff that never made me laugh. I would even force myself to read "Dog Gone Funny," that especially unfunny panel at the end of "Marmaduke."

For me, "Dog Gone Funny" was sort of like a bad car accident or a solar eclipse. "Don't read it," I would warn myself. "Don't do it. It'll be bad, real bad."

But my eyes would be drawn to the panel anyway. And I would read all about Mrs. Joellen Cribbs of Skokie, Ill., and her toy poodle, Earwig, who hides his little face with his little paws every time they watch "Wheel of Fortune."

"I'll never read that again," I then would moan, "Sweet Jesus, I've learned my lesson."

These days, I'm usually too busy



Rainbow Rowell

"How can Jim Davis face himself in the mirror?"

to read the comics. I just scan the front page and the news sections. But on Sundays, that lurid color section still reels me in.

My Sunday comics readings have led me to a startling revelation. I remember the comics of my childhood as being mostly funny with just a few weak spots.

Maybe my sense of humor has radically changed or perhaps the nation's scribblers have been replaced with evil robots. I just know that the comics — at least those in the local papers — are horribly, cosmically unfunny.

I didn't grow up with "Luann" and "Hi and Lois," so it's possible they have always been a devastating waste of space.

But comics that I remember as being at least a little funny are now grossly stupid. I offer, as an example, "Garfield." It's been years since I laughed at a Garfield strip — long, tiring years of bad lasagna jokes.

In Sunday's Garfield strip, Jon is watching television. He gets up to get a sandwich, and Garfield and Odie take his seat.

That isn't funny. That isn't even remotely funny. In the old days, Garfield would have stolen the

sandwich, too. How can Jim Davis face himself in the mirror?

Other comics that were even less funny before have fallen beyond unfunny into the realm of the bizarre.

"Gasoline Alley" used to feature light-hearted jokes about simple folk. Hee hee, Slim's sneaking back for another sandwich. Ho, ho, Rufus' face is muddy again.

Now the strip obtusely attacks subjects such as married love and the afterlife. It isn't funny. It isn't moving. It's just strange.

"The Family Circus" has followed the same weird path. "The Family Circus" was never a laugh riot (especially when Billy took over), but now ... it's kind of spooky.

More and more time is spent with the robed and sandaled grandparents in heaven.

"Look Grandma," Grandpa says from above, "little Dolly, mispronounced spaghetti again."

"She's so sweet," Grandma smiles, "but don't you think it's strange for a grown woman to live at home? And little P.J.'s almost 30; shouldn't he be toilet-trained?"

I imagine that Bil Keane's real children are in intense therapy.

"Who emptied the liquor cabinet, Dolly? Was it Not Me again?"

"I did, Dad. I'm a drunk and I'm getting divorced."

"Oh, Dolly, you're such a silly. Have you seen your brother? It's time to do the Father's Day strip."

"Billy's dead, Dad. Don't you listen to anyone anymore? I hate you, Dad. I hate you!"

It's probably just as well that I don't like the comics. After all, as a serious journalist, I need to cultivate my love for the other, more respectable parts of the paper like "Super Saver" and "Dress for Success."

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Right to choose nature's intent

Abortion. Nyeah, nyeah. It's a tough subject.

Tough to write about, too. The whole topic is just so tired and old — and there's very little chance that any one person has anything new to offer to the tired, old dialogue.

But maybe I do.

I don't intend to convert anyone to my point of view — I know I would not be converted by three columns of black and white type in a college rag.

What I do intend is to offer some help to those who feel strongly that the right to choose must be defended from an increasingly violent rhetoric of guns and bombs and screaming misogyny — while they wrestle with qualms of their own about the nature of abortion.

I also seek readers who, while they suspect abortion on ethical or moral grounds, nevertheless have an investment in human rights — in particular, the rights of women.

I hope there are many within the university community who are in this situation — or in the process of re-evaluating their own beliefs on this, the most strongly polarized of issues.

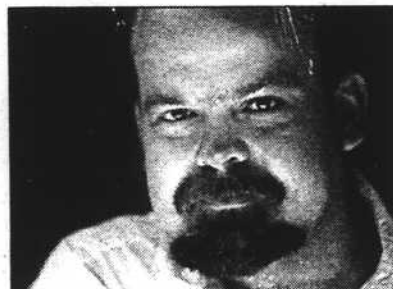
All who have their minds made up (or made up for them) may pass on to greener pages.

Abortion is a terrible thing. I don't know anyone who feels otherwise. It ends something growing inside a woman. It is a secret death and no one takes it lightly.

To those in the ranks of the "pro-life" movement, abortion represents a kind of holocaust of innocents. They look at the statistics and see oceans of human blood spilled each year, legally, in industrial "mills."

To them, this amounts to human sacrifice at the altar of convenience.

And I agree. Human blood is



Mark Baldrige

"A pregnant woman is a twin being."

spilled. Terrible sacrifices are made.

And I believe it all happens by the design of God.

God or Nature or some Force which cannot be written off as blind and automatic designed the world so.

Let me explain.

In order to avoid further offending the religious, I'll refer to the creator of us all as "nature" — I'll speak of nature, not capriciously, as "she."

Next week we'll talk about who or what I think she is.

This week, to the point.

Nature, in her wisdom, made human beings a certain way: We carry our young in our bodies. We feed them from our bodies.

But, most particularly, we care for them — both in and outside our bodies — for years.

Human children are not like the offspring of horses or dogs — or even apes. A human child will still be toddling and weak two years after its birth.

It will depend on its parents for at least the first eight years of its life, probably more.

I wonder that there is not more

wonder at this.

Horses and dogs and apes are able to fend for themselves within weeks or months after they are born. But it is different with us.

With us, a child will be a long time coming of age — and some will take longer than others. It means a lot to have a child. Decisions must be made.

Before a child is born, nature has wisely entrusted those decisions to the minds and instincts of women.

A pregnant woman is a twin being. Tied up in a symbiotic relationship, she makes decisions for more than just herself. She carries the responsibility of another life.

No one else can make those choices with which nature has entrusted her.

She is on her own.

Her religion, her friends and family, the pressures of society can only shape the mind that makes those decisions, they are powerless to make them directly.

And it should be so.

A woman faces death, literally, in the bearing of children. She faces ongoing responsibilities which will stretch into years. Long after a horse would no longer even recognize its foal, a human woman will be teaching her child to read its first, faltering words.

Nature asks a lot of women — including that they live in a world where they can not always count on men.

But nature is wise; she does everything for a reason.

We would be unwise to try to take responsibility for the decisions a pregnant woman must make out of her own hands — it would be impossible to do so anyway.

Nature, or God, has made us so.

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