



After our last issue hit the street, a few of you emailed or Facebooked me to ask, “Where’s your column?!” You have no idea how touched I was to know you missed me – or at least noticed my absence. And though the vast majority of you *didn’t* email or Facebook me, I trust you’re silently longing for an explanation, too. So here it is: I had written a column – spent quite a bit of time and energy on it, in fact – and at the very last minute, for reasons far too boring to waste space on, it became irrelevant. I had to cut it. Believe me when I say “it hurt me a lot more than it hurt you.” Argh.

While scrambling to fill the space, I began reading through my old columns, hoping I could find a “classic” to republish. (“You can’t just... *sit out an issue!*” cried my ego.) No luck. Turns out, most of my stuff is either too dated (i.e. no longer relevant, which is how I got in trouble in the first place), or just too... *wrong*. What I realized, while reading through those old columns, is that I don’t always know what I’m talking about... and I change my mind a lot. (Not to mention my mood.) As I trudged through my archives, going back several years, I encountered someone both cynical and hopeful, arrogant and insecure, scornful and merciful. I heard a voice that was mine, but not mine... a voice searching for wisdom... and only sometimes finding it. Sort of.

It was a humbling experience. I’ve been told those are good for the soul. All I know for sure is that they’re painful.

Frankly, it's a wonder you people listen to anything I have to say, when I'm so clearly confused and conflicted. Good thing I'm not a life coach (like Aunt Bossy) or a mind/body counselor (like our yogi, Shelley). Unfortunately, I have no practical advice to offer (like our gardening columnists Laura Lee and Alice, or our fitness guru, Ian), no recipes to share (like our Everyday Gourmet, Debbi), and I certainly don't know much about etiquette, a la LA Plume.

What I do possess, I hope, is honesty – and the audacity to tell you how things look from here in my head, even when the view's not pretty. My husband says I “over-share” – and he'll say I just over-shared by telling you that – but what else can a writer offer, if not complete, unvarnished candor? (Besides recipes and gardening tips and fitness advice, that is... )

Bottom line: If it's wisdom you seek, you won't find much here... but you *will* find someone who's seeking it, too, and who's happy to share any little grain she stumbles on. And having written this column for 12-plus years, there

*are*

a few tidbits I've picked up along the way. Most of them pertain specifically to column writing – but they could just as well apply to Life in the Information Age, I think. For any of you who spend time “opinionating” – in print, online, in your neighborhood bar, or even in your living room – here are some helpful rules of engagement. They took me years to learn. I offer them to you now in hopes of sparing you my pain and frustration.

1) Don't expect people to consider a controversial point of view just because you have. (And just because you're... you!) Most people are happily ensconced in their belief systems and don't wish to have their boats rocked... even by you! Respect that position, and don't let it get to you.

2) If you simply must share your controversial opinion, expect disgruntled pushback, and don't feel (or act) like a victim when you get it. You have a right to say what you think, but you don't have a right to be liked for it. If you dish it out, you must cheerfully take it.

3) Recognize that, despite your vast intelligence, deep well of insight and unique sensitivity... you just might be wrong. It happens. Occasionally.

4) When you're wrong, have the courage and grace to admit it. People are usually nicer about it than you think they'll be. Especially when it means that *they're* right.

5) No matter how utterly transformed and chock full o' love you feel, do not rhapsodize about your religion to those who aren't interested. They will not "come around" and they'll probably just go away.

6) Remember that politics is not religion, even though people treat it as such. The Constitution is not a holy writ and politicians are several steps down from God. Do not put too much faith in this ideology or that one... or this party or that one. They are all flawed.

7) Don't be embarrassed to stick up for someone who seems perfectly decent to you, despite what all the snide smart alecks are saying. Mitt Romney comes to mind. Barack Obama, too. (Perfectly decent, that is. Not snide smart alecks.) Trust your gut.

8) Don't buy into the "narrative" presented by the media. (Any media.) It is always distorted. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes accidentally, but always distorted. (See the Trayvon Martin case.) I've been studying this phenomenon for a long time now, and I feel confident in making this claim. But then again... I'm part of the media. (See #3.)

9) Stop expecting to find an "unbiased news source." It doesn't exist. Quit driving yourself crazy.

10) Always give people the benefit of the doubt – and assume the best of them – until they give you some reason not to. Yes, *all* people.

And, now, on a somewhat unrelated note...

No matter how much she begs and pleads – and how many times you hear “all the other kids have one!” – do NOT get your fifth-grader a cell phone. She will promptly lose it, but only after developing a wicked texting addiction that leaves you way too familiar with the top of her head. When she DOES lose the phone, be sure to spend hours retracing her steps through downtown Beaufort, stopping in every restaurant, shop and gallery you visited the day before; make sure, as well, to check in with the Lanier Parking guys, the Greenery guys, and the guys at the Marina store. (Apparently, people turn in lost cell phones at these locations.) Going through this exhausting, time-consuming ritual is the only way to ensure that you eventually find the phone at home, in some vile, nasty nether-region of your sofa that you never knew existed.

Okay, folks. That’s all I got for now. Stay tuned.

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