

BATHROOM READING

September 27, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

I mentioned recently that I no longer read books, per se, at least not fiction. But I neglected to say that I do read magazines, although they too are dwindling in importance due to a lack of interesting content for my tastes. And this is not a put-down, but I do most of my magazine reading in the bathroom, a bit at a time. We have a little vertical wooden magazine rack on the floor at knee level that I can lay an open magazine on. How perfect!

Back in the 1950s, in my parent's home, as the oldest of five boys, I grew up reading things like Life Magazine, the Saturday Evening Post, and especially National Geographic; where else would a teenage boy find photos of naked women?

And over the years Margaret and I have tried all kinds of magazines. For years it was Newsweek and Time Magazine every week. I particularly liked Newsweek until they changed their format into something I no longer could stand to read and we just dropped it. In fact, in recent years, we have been dropping almost all of the publications we used to read. I guess I get my news from the Internet now, but it is not the same.

We still get Time Magazine by some fluke; I thought we stopped renewing it, but it keeps on coming. I go through "Time" in about five minutes. Not interesting enough to read slowly anymore. And then there are the magazines we have attempted to bring back.

And we brought back National Geographic for a couple of years. I like the photography and some of the articles, but I don't need it either. It's gone. I keep threatening to order the entire run of the magazine, which has been digitized, but I never have. And I tried a year of Smithsonian Magazine, but it is practically unrecognizable these days. They have replaced nature with social issues. I sure don't need that!

And, as you might have guessed we tried a flock of dharma-related rags, but the dharma is getting so commercialized that we have let all of those just run out too. I know magazines (and all print publications) are having a hard time, but they are in trouble with me as well. I can't find anything I like to read. There are exceptions, which I will detail here.

My current favorite magazine, one that is so large that I can never read it all is "The Economist." If you like relatively short, concise, in-depth articles on the U.S. and other major countries, this is the magazine for you. Unlike most other publications, which I throw aside in minutes, "The Economist" sits on my desk waiting for me to read it, and I do, but the ball is in my court, and often I never find time to do it justice. The old quote from William Blake, "Enough, or Too Much" works here. I am glad there is at least one magazine that is too much, more than I can absorb.

I am very interested in the environment and have tried all kinds of environmentally-oriented magazines and let them all lapse with one exception, the "Earth Island Journal." This journal is not the slickest looking of the lot, but just about every last article is first rate and holds my interest. This is stuff I want to be reading. "Earth Island" is a quarterly and costs just \$9.95 a year. If you like environmental journalism and other hot social issues presented in balanced but true reporting, this is worthwhile reading.

<http://www.earthisland.org/journal/>

And there is my secret pleasure. A few years ago my son, who was living with us for the summer, subscribed to "Rolling Stone Magazine," and his copies ended up in our bathroom, where I found that despite myself I still took a voyeuristic joy in the lives of music celebrities. Who would have known? And I like the politics. Well my son moved on, but I found myself subscribing to Rolling Stone just for fun. Imagine that, "fun?"

And that's about all I read, except for stuff on the Web. Of course AARP Magazine never stops coming now that I am older. Just what I need, a magazine for old people. I look at it once in a while, mostly to see how bad my favorite celebrities look these days, but then, I always have the mirror to reflect on.