

ON A LIGHTER SIDE with Andy Rooney



Five days a week, five newspapers are delivered to my office before I get in. I spend about 45 minutes reading them, but I'm not a fast reader — 250 words a minute, maybe. There are more than 10,000 words in an average column of newspaper type. There are more than 50 pages in most newspapers, with usually six columns on a page. Fortunately, there aren't many columns of solid type and there are pictures, headlines and big advertisements that take up a lot of space. Even so, I don't read what must be millions of words in the newspapers I get.

I keep waiting for someone to invent a way to get more information into my brain quicker. I envision a machine that has a headset with electrodes. I'd fasten the device over my head near where the learning center of my brain is located. I'd turn on the machine with the information and it would feed everything directly into my brain. I know it's not crowded up there, but over time, I suppose, my brain would fill up, so I'd need another device to remove unwanted information. I already have a lot of information I could do without. (You may remember I memorized "Jack and Jill" in Latin when I was about 14 and it's still there taking up space.)

There's more to know than we have time to learn. I think civilization suffers from our lack of knowledge. When I think of all the things about which I'm ignorant, I worry about the world. I'm what I'd call of average intelligence (on a good day), but there are a lot of people dumber than I am and that's what scares me.

It seems certain to me that school ends too early for all of us. Why do we arbitrarily decide to stop formal learning after we get

through high school at age 18 or college at 21 or 22? Do we know everything by then? It seems obvious to me that learning should never end and school should never be over for any of us.

There's no good reason we shouldn't continue to educate ourselves long after we're what we think of as "grown up." I don't suppose it's a good thing for me to say, but we've got a lot of dumb old people and I can say it because I'm one of them. There's no reason in the world why it should be wrong or unusual for a person in his 60s or 70s to go to school. "You're never too old to learn" is a popular thing to say but we don't act as if it were true.

Actually, our opinions are more important than what we know because we're more apt to act on our opinions even though they aren't always based on knowledge. The more knowledge we have, the better our opinions ought to be. The trouble is, we often forget to apply our knowledge to our opinions. A good opinion is one that stands the test of time and still seems to be true long after you first had it.

The biggest problem with my idea would be getting people smart enough to teach. I've met some high school and grade school teachers over the years and I cringe to think they're responsible for educating our young people. Too many teachers know enough about one subject to teach that, but a good teacher should be knowledgeable about many subjects. A great many teachers should take a few years off and go back to school to finish their own education.

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