

Maddog Unleashed

Paying It Forward: That Elusive Buck Just Can't Stop Here

For a man of expansive nature sums are hell; they narrow and degrade the mind. —Frank O'Connor, "The Masculine Principle"



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

This may seem anachronistic in the 21st century, but can we please bring back the stocks, if only for the swindlers at various global financial institutions?

As punishment for these paper-shuffling pirates, a stint in the stocks certainly seems appropriate, even ironic. And it's infinitely preferable to paying out hundreds of millions in bonuses to the flim-flam men running sleazy casinos like AIG, a bonehead move that's sure to send the wrong message. Stealing the safe? Hey, don't forget the cash register!

Getting locked in the stocks was a very public punishment, often enhanced by a vigorous pelting with offal, dung and refuse by an outraged citizenry.

With visuals like that, this old-school penal system might be marketable as a reality-TV show, and then perhaps the taxpayers could recoup some of the billions flushed down Wall Street's bottomless diamond-studded commode. Persuade Donald Trump and Bernard Madoff to co-host between court dates and I think we'll have a ratings powerhouse on our hands.

Dollars and Nonsense. As you know, I'm no Paul Krugman. The O'Grady males are legendary for their inability to manage any amount of money. But even a beer-swilling Mick can taste the grapes of wrath once a screw-top short dog has been broken over his head.

Two friends have seen their newspaper jobs blown away by this ill wind. A neighbor got pink-slipped by a top-flight hotel and has to sell her house. A reader reports that his gig with the Colorado Geological Survey has crumbled like old sandstone and passes on a bit of black humor: "What's the difference between a Colorado geologist and a pigeon? A pigeon can make a deposit on a new car."

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime? Unemployment locally is above 8 percent and rising, 25,000 people are out of work, and the soup kitchen's numbers have begun to rival Mickey D's. Downtown has more vacant spaces than a meth addict's jawbone. Me, I'm still working—but I haven't been spending. For once, an O'Grady male's wallet has been shut tighter than an oyster guarding a pearl, and at precisely the wrong moment in history.

It's fear, pure and simple—turning 55 seven years into a 30-year mortgage with two part-time jobs in an industry with all the future of a titty bar in Tehran (that's journalism, not cycling), plus a shockingly reduced investment portfolio that, if augmented by a buck, will buy me a bullet with which to shoot myself when and if I reach retirement age.

Paying It Forward. But hey, as I said earlier, restraint of trade is not written into my Gaelic ROM. So bit by bit, I've been gingerly relaxing that white-knuckled death grip on my dollars.

I could really use a computer built in this millennium for my work at VeloNews.com. But it's tough to be frugal in the Mac environment, so instead of spending too large on a new iMac I bought some parts to keep my 1999 BRAIN hand-me-down limping along.

Nor are a new bike, helmet or shoes in my immediate future. But I have dropped a few bucks at a local shop for some spare tubes and lubes. I'm striving for prudence, not profligacy, in dispersing my own personal stimulus package.

Still, I might be persuaded to contribute to a Tar and Feathers Fund targeted at the house-of-cards sharks who dealt us this miserable hand off the bottom of the deck, then smugly cashed in our chips. Just make sure it's a 501 (C) (3).