

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FUNNIES GONE?

By Fred Hobbs

Facebook, WiFi, Twitter, Droid. Those are among the examples of 21st Century nomenclature under the electronic umbrella called “the new media.”

The “old” media, one could say, began to die out with the publishing of the Gutenberg Bible printed with movable type in the 15th century. And, drawings in caves and on ancient walls even preceded that development. In fact, it seems that every twenty years or so some kind of “new media” has surfaced. Radio was a decidedly new medium when it thrilled listeners with earphones and crystal sets in the early 20th century. And television was not far behind.

Gutenberg must be turning over in his grave at all of this, especially since the printed page seems to be the biggest “victim” in the emergence of new media.

Newspapers are dying or are on death’s door. Denver lost a great treasure with the demise of the *Rocky Mountain News* in 2009. The *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans publishes a paper version only three times a week. An on-line edition is offered, but many residents of the Crescent City are deprived of the very features that made the paper and others including the *Rocky* such a integral part of daily life.

The remaining Denver daily, *The Denver Post* has decreased not only its number of pages, but the size of each page. Some wags have dubbed it “The Incredible Shrinking Post.”

The chief reasons for the rapidly advancing disappearance of the daily newspaper are the technological innovations that have spawned the current version of “the new media.” The news of the day is still plentiful, however. News is there by a click or two on the computer keyboard. Cable, network and local television offers coverage, but the viewer must be aware of the biases that have penetrated the medium, especially on cable.

The part of the paper devoted to national, regional and local stories called the “news hole” has shrunk perceptively on most papers. Sports still occupies a major share of space. But, many folks say they miss the changes in what used to be called “the funny papers,” especially as a antidote to all the grim and gritty crime news and chronicles of scandalous behavior in Washington, Hollywood and even on the hometown scene.

True, we still can chuckle at *Beetle Bailey* and Sarge, his nemesis. *Blondie* and Dagwood and Earl and Opal, the feisty old couple depicted in *Pickles*, draw some laughs. Very much missed is a daily helping of *Peanuts*. Snoopy, Charlie Brown and Lucy are still there on a Sunday rerun of the late Charles Schulz’s creation. Couldn’t some talented artist carry on the strip and create some more weekday fun for us, too? And, how about bringing back *Li’l Abner*, and *The Far Side*?

Where have all the funnies gone? Given the trend, *all* comic strips soon may disappear. The “new media” seem devoid of humor. Or, maybe we oldsters just don’t get it or don’t like what we get. As singer/satirist “Weird Al” Yankovic puts it: “I don’t think there are any new media I’d like to cover.”