



Comment is free, but never easy



MARTIN'S FAREWELL
by Mark Marlow

Facts are sacred, comment is free. So said the fabled editor of the Manchester Guardian, CP Scott, around the start of the last century.

This dictum has been handed down through generations of newspapers, usually interpreted as a shot across the bows of those who would comment rather than report.

In the near century since Scott's heyday, comment has been elevated within the pages of newspapers, but today, in the internet age, his dictum has more relevance than ever. The web is choc-a-bloc with comment, much of it little more than top of the head opinion, the kind of stuff that would have Scott spinning in his grave.

For those of us who do write opinion pieces in newspapers, there is a lot more required than just the capacity to have an opinion.

The first tool of the opinion writer should be the ability to write. You may have a subject that is difficult to sustain.

On these days, the reader might derive enjoyment from reading something that is well written.

Our old friends the facts are sacred in comment. For opinion to hold any water it must be based on fact. For example, if you are arguing that the Government is doing a terrible job, then facts require that you back up such a contention.

Opinion poll results, policies that have had a devastating impact on some people, the performance of leading politicians, all of these must be analysed in furthering such an argument, and facts must be sprinkled throughout the offering. Never, ever rely on

the web for your facts, for if you do, you will fail, if not today, then certainly in the near future.

Experience is a good ally for the opinion writer. In order to garner opinions you must have some knowledge of the way things work, such as politics, the courts, areas like planning or education. If you have a reasonably good knowledge then you are aware when something is not right, and your passion is ready to be fired up.

Comment may indeed be free, but when it's done properly, it certainly isn't easy.



There is a difference between fact and opinion

News is fact - opinion is your point of view.

If teachers vote to go on strike, news is the account of what they did. Opinion is your view on their decision - good or bad.

The views expressed are your own. They may not be shared by everyone, but they are how you feel about the teachers going on strike, whether you think they are right or wrong, the effects the strike may have on you and other students.

But the key is to say something only if you have something to say. There is no point sitting on the fence. Be provocative, stir a few emotions, ruffle a few feathers. There is nothing better than a good rant, once you can back up your argument.

Never try to be controversial for the sake of it.



Over to you...

- Newspapers are as much about views as news. Can you distinguish between the two? Select some examples.
- Choose an opinion piece from one of the papers supplied. What interests you? Write your own version.
- Look at the letters page in one of the papers supplied. Choose one that you agree/disagree with? Outline why.
- Compare and contrast how broadsheet and tabloid papers handle comment. Which do you prefer? Why?
- Write a letter to the editor in not more than 400 words.





JENNIFER O'CONNELL

Mother's Day cards turn women into bland one-dimensional figures

In looking at Mother's Day cards for my mother, I'm not exactly inspired. Mothers, in the world of Hallmark, are nurturing, self-sacrificing, unbragging. They love bunny rabbits, lavender and bouquets of flowers in unlikely, lurid hues. They exist only as a reflection of their greatest creation, and that, of course, is the person whose signature is scrawled across the inside. You were always there, they read. You give us much.

"Happy Mother's Day," exclaims one I found at the internet, "You're Greatest Teacher, my Best Friend and my Cheapest Therapist."

None of them apply to my own mother. She is nurturing and kind, and yes, she offers free therapy on occasion, but those aren't the most interesting things about her. She's adventurous, strong, feminist. Impeccably stylish. Whip-smart. A baker of scones and idios. She used to coax children out of their silent world. She still has a Sherlock Holmes-like ability to read human behaviour.

None of them apply to me, not unless there's one out there praising mediocre cooking skills, unconquered laundry mountains and excellent bedtime stories. None of them apply to any mother I know. Mother's Day cards do one thing well: they reflect the way we sanitise motherhood, turning women who have children into bland, one-dimensional figures, whose worth is measured in a currency of sacrifice and self-immolation.

That is the most shocking thing about becoming a mother, the violent evisceration of your previous identity. No one warns you about this until it happens because we're not supposed to mind. We choose it. It's a gift, they say, the subtlety being that you don't mean about a gift.

Motherhood, the same people gush, is the most important job in the universe. And yet there are no university degrees leading to it, no examinations from that life to this, no night classes, not even a real handbook. Instead there are books with titles that suggest children are animals to be subjugated and bent to our will. *Toddler Taming*, *Baby Whisperer*, *The Contented Little Baby Book*. I read, much too late, that Gina Ford never had children.

In the chaotic one-day, perhaps just a few days into my motherhood career, the baby was strapped to me, screaming like she alone had been sent to warn humanity of the imminent apocalypse. Does she have colic, an older woman wondered, sending me into a tangle of panic. Why was she asking me? Did I look like some kind of expert? Clearly, I didn't know what I was doing – the evidence was strapped to me, howling. I went home and googled 'colic' and cried again. I was crying for the child who might or might not have colic (it turned out the just didn't like straps), and who certainly had a hopelessly inept mother. But I was also crying for myself, for the identity that had been forcibly retired the second the kindly midwife in the labour ward handed me a cup of tea, and called me "Mummy".

Here's the good news: I've gotten easier. Either that, or you find a way for the two parts of your life to peacefully co-exist. In the almost 12 years since, I've noticed that some of the best, happiest mothers are the ones who were the most resistant in the beginning, the most affronted by the cleaving of their lives in two.

Time winds down, and the long days spool into short years. It passes in a blur of hot cheeks against yours and sterilising and late-night dashes to the pharmacy and wiping and glitter-covered Mother's Day cards and rows over hairbrushing and small hands on your knee.

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It passes in countless tiny triumphs only you notice – the first time you get through a supermarket and no one ends up lying on the floor. The first time you get to watch a movie the whole way through. The first time they say "I love you" before you sit it. Then one day, you turn around, and the angry little baby in the carrier is tall enough to wear your clothes and sit

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Peast day is turning ghoulish

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OVERALL WINNER 2018



WE ARE ALL ON A TIMER...

By Sophie Rosenau

Pobalscoil na Tríonóide, Youghal

60..... 59..... 58..... 57..... 56.....

Life is just a giant clock. It starts at twelve and keeps ticking until the cycle is complete. Until the cuckoo stops singing and the chimes stop ringing. Time. A four letter word that scares us all. We try to hide, but in the end death is the one thing that is certain in life. Time. It controls everything we do, yet some people just sit around and waste this vital gift. If you stop and think about it, we are all on a timer. If you listen closely you can hear it ticking, it's just disguised as a heartbeat. We all claim to live in the moment, but we obsess over the past and worry about the future. We, as a society, just need to stop and breathe. Start embracing yourself, revel in all the positive aspects of your life that surround you on a daily basis. Whether that be your family, your friends or your pets. You should make every day worthwhile. Make priceless memories, because you never know when your timer is going to "ding". You never know when it will be your last "Hello", your last "I love you" or even your last "Goodbye". Yes, we all have bad days but we should focus on the little things. Even if it's as simple as getting a new pen to write with, be grateful. I would give anything for the day you wasted moping around with a frown on your face. I would give up anything to have just one more day.

Time is an issue that's personal to me because I wish I had more of it. I would love to just turn back the clocks and give him one more hug. When you say you had a bad day, just evaluate what went wrong and see if it was really that disastrous? I mean, what did you do, break a nail? Stub your toe? Stop moaning about the minor inconveniences, because you didn't hear me complain about the months I suffered in silence while my grandad slowly wasted away. Until he was just skin dragged over bone, hurting from day to day.

I sit and listen to you when you complain to me that you are grounded because you were giving cheek. I zone in and out of the conversation wishing I was with my grandad, hearing all of the interesting stories about his life: when he was a child, a teenager, and his wise advice for me. Instead I'm listening to your nonsense. My mind is racing. I just get

Learn from last year's winner



up and walk out. That was before I knew my whole world was going to come crashing down. I'm grateful that I left that classroom early, little did I know a timer was going to go off sooner rather than later.

30..... 29..... 28..... 27..... 26.....

I could almost feel the countdown begin when I saw my dad walking into the office. As selfish as it was, I thought he was bringing me lunch, or maybe even meeting a teacher. Yet it was neither: it was my worst nightmare coming straight for me and I didn't even get a chance to brace myself. Leaving immediately, we rushed to the airport. Everything that day was a blur and before I knew it we had taken off and landed. After a whole day of hurrying from trains, to buses, and even occasionally sprinting, we were still too late. He couldn't wait for us any longer.

3..... 2..... 1.....

"Ding".

