

Mike Royko

Another wasted three pounds

by Mike Royko

The brain. What an amazing organ. Only three pounds or so in an adult, but containing millions of cells that create and transmit chemicals and electrical impulses controlling virtually everything we do. Every movement and thought. Every emotion. Our senses of hunger, thirst, smell, sight.

Think about that. It was that mere three pounds of gray and white matter in his skull that led Edison to create the phonograph, the light bulb, and thousands of other devices we now take for granted.

From Einstein's three pounds of brain came thoughts that brought about the atomic age and opened new concepts of the universe.

The brains of Mozart and Beethoven brought forth sounds that today, centuries after they have died, still move audiences to joy and tears.

The brain of Shakespeare probed man's capacity for good and evil. The brain of Da Vinci conceived of man flying four centuries before the brains of the Wright Brothers made it reality.

Remarkable machines took men to the moon and sustained their lives. But three-pound brains created those machines. We have computers that, in a twinkling, solve mathematical problems that once took weeks, months or years. But the human brain created the computers.

All around us are soaring skyscrapers, incredible ground and air vehicles, shelf upon shelf of great literature, electronic impulses sending sights and sounds around the world in an instant. Everything from the superconducting supercollider to the humble yet gratifying McDonald's french fry --- the products of that three pounds of gray matter in the skull of man.

But how often do most of us think about the brain, except when we have a headache? Many scientists study it and they've solved many of its mysteries. But they still know less than they have learned.

The rest of us? Depending on our age and gender, we give far more thought to our biceps, breasts, buttocks, scalps, facial skin and reproductive organs.

Ask yourself: When was the last time you thought about your brain? Or anyone else's brain, for that matter? Not lately, I'll wager.

And I'm as guilty as anyone. But just the other night I found myself pondering the amazing workings of this most incredible of organs.

It was when a blizzard hit Chicago. Almost a foot of snow just in time for evening rush hour. And there I was, behind the wheel of my car, waiting for light to turn from red to green so I could continue my slow homeward journey.

As I waited, I saw a car creep into the intersection, then stop directly in my path. The person driving that car stopped because traffic ahead of her was jammed for blocks. She should have known that would happen. But she moved into the intersection anyway, then just sat there.

The light changed. Now it was my turn to go forward. But I couldn't. The man next to me couldn't. The dozens of people behind us couldn't. We just sat because the woman and her car blocked our way.

That's when I began thinking about the incredible human brain. Einstein's equation: energy equals mass times the velocity of light squared. Edison searching the world for a filament that would light our homes and streets. Beethoven's ninth symphony. Popeil's Pocket Fisherman.

But there sat this creature, blessed with a three-pound brain mass and those millions of

cells. Yet she was incapable of a simple thought: "If I put my foot on the gas and creep a few more yards, I'll stop and when the light changes those people on my left won't get past me." Or a simple question: "I'm not going anywhere



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anyway, so why should I block their way and make a bad situation even worse?"

The light changed again. And again. But she couldn't move. That was her bad luck, but why should she make her bad luck my bad luck? And the bad luck of dozens behind me?

Then she glanced to her left and saw me glaring at her. She quickly looked away. I guess the sight of a stranger's bared fangs was unpleasant.

It occurred to me that her brain's problem might be a lack of information. Input, as the computer people call it. I decided to give her some input.

I stepped out of my car and bellowed: "Lady, you know what you are? You are a (Editor's note: On rare occasions, Royko uses language that isn't appropriate for a family newspaper. So we have removed it. But you can use your imagination.)"

Because I have a loud voice, she heard every word. And her jaw dropped. A good sign. It meant the brain cells that receive and interpret crude, vile, obscene language were functioning. So were brain cells that make jaws drop.

The driver on my right honked his horn. He waved and gave me a thumb's up gesture, and indication that this three-pound cerebral mass was in good working order.

For a moment I thought about asking him if he would care to join me in getting out our tire irons and smashing her headlights and windows. But a portion of my brain told me that while it would be an act of justice, it would accomplish nothing more than making me feel good.

Eventually, she moved on. And as her wheels spun, she turned and stuck out her tongue. How disappointing. It meant that my input had been rejected and, when the opportunity arose, she'd block another intersection.

Nevertheless, I'm still amazed at the workings of the human brain. And someday science will figure out why brains are wasted on so many damn fools.

Opinion

National Nutrition Month: Writer doubts that Dobbins meals meet standards

by Jennifer Flanagan
Collegian Staff Writer

Ah well, it's National Nutrition Month again and Dobbins Hall is touting the catchy little phrase, "Enjoy the taste of eating right." How very ironic.

Taking a closer look at the nutritional value of Dobbins' menu, I find that the foods are generally deep-fried and/or high in fat and salt. Of course, Dobbins offers the occasional alternate selection, but those are usually sauteed in butter.

Or is it margarine? Now there's a healthy alternative. Contrary to popular belief, margarine is not good for you. It is simply unsaturated fat, which is better for you than the saturated fat in butter, but any high fat food is unhealthy. If the food isn't deep-fried or doused with butter, chances are it is smothered in cheese. You know, cheese, that high cholesterol, high fat dairy product?

Speaking of dairy products, whole milk contains eight times as much fat as skim milk, and roughly twice the fat of 2% milk. So I guess that's why there are four dispensers of whole milk (including chocolate) and only one each for 2% and skim.

According to the Surgeon General, a maximum of 30% of our daily intake of calories should be from fat. One gram of fat equals nine calories. So for example, let's say you choose a glass of whole milk at 100 calories and 8 grams of fat. That translates to 72 fat calories. Skim milk, on the other hand, has only 80 calories, nine of which are from fat.

To focus on another favorite nutritional 'no-no' at Dobbins, let's look at the sodium content of the food. Bear in mind that the suggested intake of sodium per day, according to the American Dietetic Association, is approximately 1100 mg for

women and 2500 mg for men. Now, the meals at Dobbins average from 300 mg to 800 mg of salt per serving. And we all know how big those servings are. Hardly the way to lower your blood pressure.

Of course, you could choose a dish of overcooked vegetables, but then why bother? Once the vegetables are overcooked, the nutritional value is lost. Might as well have a glass of water instead. Now don't get me wrong; you can occasionally find a dish of fresh fruit that isn't marinating in high fructose corn syrup or covered with whipped cream. Do you think that could mean that perhaps they know fruit is naturally sweetened?

Many people who are trying to lose weight should concentrate less on the amount of calories they are consuming and more on the type. I am also well aware that many people enjoy the taste of salt and butter. For those who wish to indulge, a container of butter is available with the other condiments and there are salt shakers on every table. There is no need to mandate the use of butter and salt in every meal. Let people decorate their own plates, and leave the rest of us to enjoy a healthy meal.

Considering that Dobbins Hall is the primary food source for the majority of on-campus residents, I think that they should assume a greater role in promoting healthy eating habits. And, after all, it is National Nutrition Month.

Oh, I almost forgot to mention, Dobbins Hall does offer two or three low salt, low sugar, and low fat cereals and a salad bar which are healthy, as long as you skip the mayonnaise-laden dressings at the salad bar and drink skim or 2% milk. Salad and cereal every day for eight months. What a selection. Enjoy the taste of eating right.

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