

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Agree to disagree

A new year brought new faces to area boards and councils and a new initiative to get to work on developing a plan to progress into the future.

But despite all that newness, some old demons are still appearing at the Falls Municipal Building where members of the International Falls City Council meet, whether it be as a council or Economic Development Authority.

Those old demons involve the group's confrontational nature. It's the kind of negativity that could lead to a voyage backwards for this community. It accomplishes nothing and contrasts with the positive efforts of so many people to move us toward being a vital, healthy and energetic community.

Like we've said before here, this council is made up of people who are motivated by the best intentions and their action or inaction is dictated by the best interests of this community. We appreciate that.

Council and EDA meetings are where members' homework on issues should be shared, opinions revealed and debated, and resolution

to concerns and problems sought.

Don't get us wrong. We encourage and support lively discussion and debate in this publication and at council and board tables. It's how mistakes are corrected, problems solved and goals accomplished.

The problem is it appears some members are skipping the last step: Seeking resolution to issues and concerns. Instead, some members seem to be pushing their own agendas and simply counting on enough votes to further their causes.

This community has experienced a council that nearly always had unanimous votes on motions. Discussions in committees revealed where each stood on an issue, and compromise and resolution was reached out of sight of community members. It was not ideal.

These officials are elected by voters to do the city's business. They don't have to be friends. They don't have to even like one another. But more can be accomplished by working together, and even agreeing to disagree, than treading water putting this community's forward movement on hold.



GUEST COLUMN

Are you dying to write your own obit?

Are you an unsung hero? Do those you encounter not appreciate the “real” you? Must you always having the last word?

Then you might be interested in the new trend spotted by USA Today: self-penned obituaries, also known as “selfie obits” or “autobituaries.”

As someone who has been chronicling some semblance of his ups and downs and opinions over the past 16 years, I probably shouldn't begrudge anyone else the opportunity to write their own final testament, but I feel obligated to point out the pitfalls.

For one thing, the earlier in life you start the obituary, the more it's just one more nagging thing to keep updated. Otherwise an octogenarian will pass away with the remembrance “Just you wait until the SECOND half of kindergarten, Maggie O'Day — you'll be my girlfriend sure.”

Perhaps someone will start a public service campaign to remind people to update their obituaries on New Year's Eve, when they



Danny TYREE

TYRADES!

replace their smoke alarm batteries. Of course priorities might get messed up. (“My greatest accomplishment so far? Photocopying my bottom just now — without throwing up more than once.”)

Standard newspaper obituaries can be boring, but at least they're professional. Unless someone does some judicious editing of the selfie obits, we will be subjected to things such as “Those stoopid teacherz awl thawt eye needed therelessins, butt I kan xpress the S-ints of hu eye am juss fine.”

While selfie obits remain a novelty, you can get away with an “eat your heart out”

or “don't you wish you had paid more attention to me while I was alive?” attitude. When EVERYBODY is trying to be creative and brutally frank, readers faced with a sea of purple prose may just think, “Hey, I wonder what Garfield is up to today?”

There is the danger of coming across as too whiney or needy. As Winston Churchill stated, “History is written by the victors.” People may get the impression that it should be “History is written by the losers who have too much time on their hands.”

Get ready for hoary obituary cliches to get a “too much information” rework, as in “He always saw the best in people — especially the internal organs. Mmmmm.”

With no one to ensure the accuracy of the obits, fantasies, outright lies and self-serving appraisals (grassy knoll revelations, never-revealed ascendancy to the papacy, etc.) will abound. Legions of lawyers will be called in to determine whether a selfie obit is really the final word, or whether others mentioned in it have a

right to add comments.

For instance, the longsuffering deceased might finally open up with, “Roscoe Noodleman busted his hump for that company for 30 years without even a gold watch.” And the former employers might want to add, “Our posthumous thanks to Mr. Noodleman for bringing a safety hazard to our attention. Our monthly safety courses now include the warning that leaning on a broom for 30 years while discussing Lakers games can lead to busted humps.”

Those who fill their obituaries with raw emotion and confessions may suffer the consequences. (“I guess my biggest regret is having that secret affair with my son's wife. That, or telling my daughter I needed that \$10,000 for an operation instead of to pay off my gambling debts. I'll bet you're going to give me the CHEAP funeral now. Oh, man!”)

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Misinterpreting Brian Williams' misremembering

BY JOE GANDELMAN
Independent's Eye

So NBC's Brian Williams is off his anchor desk for six months — wanna bet it'll be a LOT longer than that? — and has gone from being a respected anchor to a godsend to comedy writers, internet ridicule, and Jerry Seinfeld punch lines.

Up until this month, Williams seemed to be a 21st century anchorman descendant of David Brinkley and Walter Cronkite. His anchor stint and credibility were cut short when he admitted he “misremembered” being shot down in a helicopter in Iraq in 2003. NBC put him on unpaid leave, amid reports that there may be more instances of (ahem) memory flaw.

Williams wasn't merely the brand name for NBC News. His narrative was what the network was aggressively selling.

He was someone who had “been there.” A recent NBC ad in The Week showed a front shot of Williams smiling with his hand on the shoulders of a serviceman and declared: “Some battle scars are worn on the inside. And for anyone who's been there, there's a secret. It doesn't harden you, it makes you more human. He's been

there. He'll be there. NBC Nightly News: 10-Years with Brian Williams.”

The Internet is now exploding fake photos of Williams “there.” Williams in the death car with JFK in Dallas.... on the moon...at Yalta with World War II allied leaders...with Lincoln and his generals. Soon we'll likely see Williams “there” with Clark Gable on the set of Gone with the Wind after the shoot — or with John Wilkes Booth after the shoot. You Tube has a Hitler “Downfall” parody with the murderous Nazi raging upon learning that Williams is gone.

Many analysts blame William's progressively transforming himself from the NBC Peacock into Pinocchio on his slipping into the entertainer mode, appearing on talk shows, and even lobbying to replace Jay Leno. But that doesn't explain it.

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd said NBC knew Williams was a “ticking” time bomb with his “pathological...Hemingwayesque” embellishments but no one pulled him in. On his blog, NYU Journalism Professor Jay Rosen notes that signs suggest NBC was complicit as far back as 2003 in knowing Williams' account wasn't entirely ac-

curate.

The r-e-a-l reason Williams became what he has become is that he's the latest example of someone whose career advanced because of solid journalistic or pundit qualities, which were changed by his weakness and our 21st century media culture.

To advance and market his brand (his personality) he jettisoned the some qualities that allowed him to advance to that level. He won fame and fortune but left other virtues behind. We've seen this before.

Fox News' Bill O'Reilly was a solid, award-winning local journalist who advanced to ABC News. When he left ABC for the syndicated Inside Edition show biz news show he slowly began shedding his former persona, which you can see in his infamous “WE'LL DO IT LIVE!!” off-the-air rant on You Tube. Today, he's Fox News' biggest bombastic money maker and the solid journalist of old only shines through in some serious interviews.

Chris Matthews was once a superb print political columnist. Once he got on MSNBC he turned into the interrupting, cartoonish caricature who shamelessly nags and hypes viewers to

buy his latest book. Also on MSNBC: one-time listenable liberal talker Rachael Mad-dow is often unwatchable, opening her show with a looooooong lead (you scream “Get to the point!!!”) and repeating concepts several times — while formerly serious liberal writer Chris Hayes now smugly states beliefs rather than attempts to seriously make a case.

Once Williams and others break into the top ranks, our media culture becomes like a massive Cuisinart. And many don't have strong enough ingredients called “principles” and “professional standards” not to lose their original, more serious qualities.

You might be tempted to paraphrase Shakespeare and say, “The fault, dear Brian, is not in our stars but in ourselves.” But I'd amend that to add: “...and in being absorbed, re-shaped, changed, and homogenized by our media/entertainment culture.”

The real lesson here is in another quote from The Bard: “To thine self be true.”

Gandelman is a veteran journalist who wrote for newspapers overseas and in the United States. His columns are distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate.