

10 September 2010

NOW, AS I WAS SAYING...

Prelapsarian. It's a lovely word, but hard to slip into cocktail conversations. It means "pertaining to the condition before the Fall of Man. Innocent and carefree." Well, in the prelapsarian days before Westmount was forcibly merged into the megacity, I usually managed to crank out a weekly column in the Westmount Examiner.

The column was rather unimaginatively called "Our Mayor Says." I actually wrote a total of 244 of these columns, something I do not recommend you try. They petered out (if you will excuse the verb) by 2000, as I was fighting mergers full-time by then: writing speeches, editorials, op-ed pieces, and a whole series of letters mailed to all Westmounters that I pompously entitled: "The battle against annexation: a report from the front."

After the megacity, in spite of our heroic efforts, was imposed in January 2002, I went from anti-merger to demerger mode. Finally, once we demerged, I was casting about for something to do, and decided to write a book about the mergers, a monastic exercise I began in 2006. Unfortunately, when I got elected mayor last October, I had not finished this magnum opus; and so, for the last year or so, I have been mayoring and beavering away as author at the same time.

This is why – and it took me three paragraphs to get to my point, something, dear reader, you will have to bear with if you persist in reading this stuff – I did not immediately resume my column after a hiatus

of ten years.

While my book has now been written and peer-reviewed (I challenged my publisher, McGill-Queen's University Press, to find my peer), it has yet to be copy-edited and translated. Once published, it will be a bit of a doorstopper at 200,000 words. Dorothy Parker no doubt had my book in mind when she wrote, "This is not a book to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force." Since I still have up to a year to go before the book birthing, it'll be a while before I'm completely free to write a regular column. However, I'll produce at least one a month until then.

What do I hope to accomplish with this column? You may well ask. Well, I hope to be able to give some background to Council decisions, to reach out to those of you who don't come to Council meetings or write letters to the editor. A column can also be reflective, as the act of writing helps one test and develop policies; as, if they don't make sense on paper, they generally don't make sense, period.

Politicians are, by a long chalk, plying the least respected profession in our society. While I think that party politics and partisanship is part of the problem, being dependent on the 30-second TV clip or rapid-fire email exchanges doesn't help. A column can at least be a quiet attempt to engage citizens in a one-to-one relationship. And you can always turn the page.