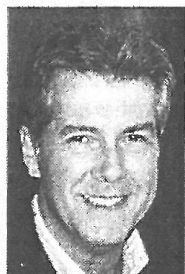


# At least the Cubs are swingin' the bat



"What's the skinny guy sayin'?"

Jake Plotner plopped on the bar stool next to mine in the cool darkness of the American Legion. Jake's a 60-something fireplug with blue eyes and white flat top who claims to be the small town cousin of the late, great Chicago columnist Mike Royko's alter ego Slat's Grobnik. I cannot confirm the identity of either fellow, but they both enjoy a good conversation over a cold beer. Some say Jake retired from a local factory where he ran a press that punched tin can lids. My son Michael worked a similar machine one hot summer.

"Toughest job I ever had, Dad," Michael said. This from a kid who detassled, painted barns and shoveled soybeans and other things for farmers since the age of 14.

Jake punched that press for 40 years, according to local legend.

Without a word, the blonde bartender handed Jake a beer and the three of us stared up at the TV.

Thanks to the proliferation of 24/7 news channels, Americans have a choice in how the events of the day are presented on TV. We have networks that lean conservative, liberal and the one that's in every airport, which appears to be simply dazed and confused at this point. But the channels do share a few things in common, like banner headlines signaling "Breaking News: Kim Kardashian Divorcing after Seventy-Two Days of Marriage," a plethora of "buy gold" commercials and talking head "experts" who seem to have so much time on their hands that they do not work a day job. Or maybe being an "expert" is their day job.

Give me a steaming cup of Joe and the morning paper.

I gestured at the flashing screen.

"He says since Congress hasn't acted on comprehensive immigration reform he's not enforcing the law to deport illegal immigrants under the age of thirty who meet certain requirements," I said.

"It's good to be King," Jake said. "But heck, his party had control of Congress for two years and never

## About Voices

Voices columns are personal essays on life. To submit a column for consideration for Voices, please send the column by email to [letters@news-gazette.com](mailto:letters@news-gazette.com) with Voices in the subject line, or by mail to Voices, The News-Gazette, 15 Main Street, Champaign, IL 61824-0677. If possible, include a jpeg head shot as an attachment with email, or a head shot with mailed columns. Columns should be a maximum of 750 words.

did nothin' about it. What's 'Mister Gentleman's Quarterly' got to say?"

A news ticker ran along the bottom of the TV highlighting civil war in Syria, Iranian nuclear denials and the announcement that a reality TV couple was having a child. GQ appeared on cue, square-jawed with every black hair in place, 60-something like Jake but not showing the wear and tear of 40 years in a factory. He said something about not necessarily disagreeing with the idea of not deporting young illegal

immigrants who fit the criteria but objected to the skinny guy's unilateral pronouncement. GQ also called for comprehensive immigration reform.

Jake and I swigged our beers. The blonde wandered to the end of the bar.

"So they agree?" Jake said, blue eyes wide. "We need new rules on this whole deal, right?"

"Yep."

Jake brushed his flat top and shifted to face me.

"This is crazy. These guys agree we need to secure the border, be reasonable about the folks already here and set up a new system to make it fair for everyone who wants to come to the U.S. That's what they're both sayin', right?"

"You're correct, my friend," I said. "Then why the hell don't they get it done?"

"Devil's in the details, I guess. But some say it's not good politics."

"Come again," Jake said, leaning on the bar.

"Stirs the pot. Fires up each party's base. Helps get the vote out. It's not about governing or doing the

right thing like both sides claim. They don't want to make proposals that the other can criticize and turn against 'em. It's all about winning elections."

"Geez," Jake said, rubbing his chin, "with all the problems this is causin' for all sorts of people, it's hard to believe that even politicians can be that cynical."

Our eyes met and we laughed.

"Another round," Jake called to the blonde. "And for Pete's sake ... change the channel. I'd rather watch the Cubs lose than listen to any more of this."

The screen glowed with green grass, blue sky and a Cub batter kicking the dirt after a swing and a miss.

"Hell, at least he's swingin' the bat," Jake said, raising his glass. "At least he's swingin' the bat."

**Mike Pemberton's short stories have appeared in such literary journals as *Aethlon*, *Touchstone* and *Euphemism*. His first novel, "Transcendental Basketball Blues," was published in 2011. He lives in Hoopston and can be contacted at [www.mikepembertonbooks.com](http://www.mikepembertonbooks.com).**