

Mike Rowe ready to shine light on more 'Dirty Jobs'

By Luaine Lee

Tribune News Service

At last Mike Rowe, the genial host of the series "Dirty Jobs," comes clean. And though he seems suited to the role, hosting a TV show was never on his clipboard.

When he was 19, he says, he looked to his future "and saw nothing but a void, a dark void. I thought, 'I can't even imagine myself with a wife and kids. I can't imagine myself without a wife and kids. I can't imagine getting a steady paycheck. I can't imagine working for anybody who would give me one. I can't imagine wanting one.' I couldn't imagine ANY scenario for happiness."

It was right after graduating that he began to panic. "I can't remember a moment when I was more unsettled than when



School of Humans/Discovery/TNS

Mike Rowe finds himself inside an escalator pit in the new version of "Dirty Jobs," which premiered on the Discovery Channel Jan. 2, 2022.

I finished high school and had absolutely no idea what to do, no idea," he says.

"I was so lucky to have parents who said, 'Look, we don't care. As long as you stay curi-

ous, as long as you work hard, we don't care. We don't care what school you go to.'

"I got a lot of pressure from my guidance counselor at high school to enroll at the University of Pennsylvania ... I took some tests. I did well. But we didn't have any money, and I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do ... that was terrifying to me even back then."

Finally confronting the unknown, Rowe says, "I thought, 'Hell — on the positive side — I'm free and I can study anything I want.'"

So he did. He buried himself in philosophy, English and the arts. "All the things I love to this day," he says. "They just never existed

for me originally as a 'thing' to pursue. They turned out to be a thing to look for, to find. I was lucky to go through that horrible period of uncertainty."

The turning point came one night when he described his day in his journal. "I sat down about 10 o'clock and started writing, and an hour later I looked up, and the sun was coming up. I thought, 'How in the hell is the sun coming up at 11 o'clock at night?' Of course, it wasn't. I had sat there all night writing a couple dozen pages in the journal about what happened that day.

"Now was it any good? Would a publisher take that and say, 'Oh, my god, you're a savant!' No, I don't think so. But what I learned and what gave me real hope was that when you're doing something that you're really enjoying and really focus on, you can compress time."

Compressing time is what Rowe does on "Dirty Jobs," which returned to the Discovery Channel in a new incarnation on Jan. 2. Whether he's neck-deep in a sewer, farming worm dung or collecting alligator eggs, Rowe exposes viewers to the unsung heroes of our society — the folk who make it all work.

"I'm basically impersonating a motivational speaker and the basic message is this idea: I meet people who don't make a lot of money, who work 12 hours a day. You make \$500,000 year, why are they happier than you? Why are they having a better time? Why are they better balanced? Why does the beer taste colder at the end of the day?"

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