

# editorial opinion

## Perspective on a year: Vietnam shadow lingers

The new year will be a dramatic milestone for me and millions of other persons in this country. Actually, the dawning of 1978 has haunted me for more than a couple of years, now. I knew, of course, that it was coming and I also knew that throughout the coming year I would be reminded of a past for which I have very mixed emotions.

That memory is Vietnam, 1968. A strange thing about milestone years is that a person remembers more about that year than any of those in between. It's like asking yourself to remember what you were doing on the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor or the day Jack Kennedy was killed.

War and death have a way of solidifying memories. It would take some effort to recall what I was doing last year or the year before at this time. But I could tell you in an instant where I was and what I was doing 10 years ago.

There will be many dates like that next year—dates that on one hand I would rather forget, but on the other I cherish for the insight into life that they spawned for me.

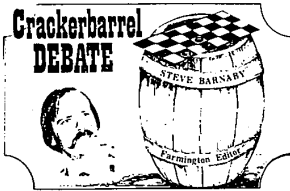
FOR MOST Americans, Vietnam is just a bad memory of a far away war which they never did get sorted out in their minds. Terms like body count, My Lai, search and destroy, student protest, Tet, and Ho Chi Minh are the uncomfortably vague terms which might pop into their minds—maybe.

"Let's forget it," is the usual emotion the average American has of the mess.

But those of us who were soldiers realize that there isn't any "forgetting." In our minds the war is still there—in vivid colors, deafening shrieks and stench of combat, the strange but beautiful land and its people, the buddies you made and who sometimes were killed, the foot deep muck, red clay, unbearable heat and continual fatigue. Especially the fatigue—physically and mentally.

I've only written one other piece on Vietnam. For a guy who can turn out a story after a 10-minute conversation with a gas station attendant, the reality exists that I am unable to write about an historical experience which I haven't been able to integrate into my psyche.

It's tough writing this column. It's difficult to



admit that a year in your life remains a segregated pocket in your mind which has neither entrance or exit.

Many acquaintances have suggested that I write a book about Vietnam. I've thought about it, but know that I probably never will. I can't. Sometimes I think I would have too much to say. At other times, I think I would have nothing to say about it.

"WHY SHOULD I grace the American public with my inner emotions and intellect about a war which they hated, defied and would just as soon forget?" I ask myself.

Students waving Viet Cong flags, Jane Fonda going to Hanoi and jellyfished politicians betraying soldiers in the field are memories too hard to forget and too painful to remember.

A lot of books are hitting the market about the Vietnam War. I've never read one of them through. I've tried, but I can't.

It's not war that I mind reading about. Many volumes in my library are concerned with the World Wars. I enjoy the historical perspectives.

But Vietnam, to many veterans, is much more than a history lesson. It's a bittersweet memory of coming of age, deep comradeships and a war lost on the battlefield, the streets of this country and the halls of Congress.

That one year did more in forming my opinions of life and the actions I have taken since, than any other.

Maybe, just maybe, the passing years will allow me to put the Vietnam War into proper perspective. But now I know that year won't be 1978. I'll never forget it—1968.

## tinkering around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

### It's buy buy blues, Santa

Dear Santa:

It's been a long time since you stopped to see me and slip a few presents into my stockings. Maybe part of your absence has to do with the fact that these old stockings have made the transition from wool to nylon (for the most part).

It's too bad, Santa. You've missed a big market when you limited yourself to kids. It's poor judgment, Claus, especially when you consider how the adults have mucked up the holiday.

Have you taken a look at the stores lately? Christmas cheer, my eye. I have a friend who goes into training for Christmas shopping with the fervor of a warrior about to embark on a crucial battle. She says it's the only way to come out alive.

While the kids can ignore the mess in the stores and look at the lights with eyes of someone seeing it all for almost the first time, ever, they only see the lights and the colors.

I USED to like going downtown to shop. Christmas was the smell of the roasted chestnuts the vendor sells in front of Hudsons. And the Salvation Army band that used to play in front of the main doors of Crowleys. Not to mention the crush of people making their way down the sidewalks as they juggled packages, purses and kids.

There was some expectancy about the whole business. You got the feeling that people knew something was about to happen—something good. Shoppers smiled at the animated dolls in the windows, complained about the cold, then sneaked into Sanders for an ice cream.

But Santa, I'm shopping in the suburbs this year, for the first time because I haven't organized my time

well enough to return to my old haunts. Maybe I'm getting old Santa, but have you seen those shoppers out here?

Not a jolly bunch at all. Let me tell you, those stores are enough to drive you straight for the first bah humbug attitude you can find.

The malls are the most garish things I've seen in a long time. Familiar that monstrosity down in Dearborn? I still believe it was designed and decorated by a late Roman Emperor who has been reincarnated as retailing exec.

I must be getting old. Lately shoppers have been resembling old junkies who have lost any satisfaction with their habit.

THEY GRAB and pay for things like robots. I chuckled to myself in a bookstore the other day because I had found the perfect gift for a good friend. The man next to me looked at me like I was an escapee from some asylum.

So, I learned my first lesson on being an adult in the affluent suburbs. You don't laugh.

If people bought things because they truly wanted to bestow a gift on a friend or a relative, I'm sure they'd be happier about it. Of course, if we were encouraged to give gifts as if they mattered to people who were important to us, a lot of people, I dare say would have their Christmas shopping lists cut in half. (And a lot of stores would have their holiday profits cut in half, too.)

Instead, we're encouraged to buy gifts for people we pass in the street everyday and normally wouldn't invite to dinner. Have you heard the radio

commercial for the fast food chain, Santa? Would even you give a gift certificate to the salesmen who helped you pick out a belt?

We're confusing thank you's with genuine presents. Presents are things you give or do because you want to, not because it's mandatory and not because the other person has given something to you in return.

The English have managed to keep their thank you's from their genuine presents by instituting Boxing Day, during which they can give little thank you gifts to the postman, milkman and butcher.

THOSE are people that you might like, but certainly no one is going to put them on the same level as the friend who sat up with you when you were sick or the old college roommate who has to rearrange plans to visit you when she's in town.

There's no way, Santa, that a radio commercial is going to get me to confuse the two.

Of course, Christmas is a great way to get into debt. Remember Santa, when I tried to rent a car from a department store, they told me I didn't have enough credit with them to do it. Yeah, these are the same people who told me I could have an extra \$200 credit for Christmas and they'd bill me in February—just about when all the books are read and all the toys are broken.

Well, Santa, if you're in the old neighborhood this year, let me know. I'll invite you in for some egg nog and we can sit around and talk about the good old days when I used to have time to make all my presents by hand. Your old friend, Louise.



## "Between the lines"

by Carl Stoddard

## Hors d'oeuvres

by Lynn Ort

### The grinch revealed

Every office has a grinch around Christmas time, but our office has the distinction of the presence of a year-round grinch—a dyed-in-the-wool complainer who's never ending list of gripes exhausts everyone.

However, I think I've discovered the key to grinchiness in this particular case, and that discovery has taught me something about myself as well, since complaining isn't peculiar to my personality either.

Our particular office grinch is never satisfied for a basically sound reason—he's a dyed-in-the-wool perfectionist, as well as being a do-it-yourself man. The grinch, who goes by various other names around here, especially in his absence, writes better, thinks better and works better than anyone else—in his mind, anyway. He may be right.

However his striving for perfection leads down a weed-choked path, because perfection can only be a goal, never a reality. Especially when you're dependent on teamwork and the responsibility of others, striving for perfection has its limits.

WHEN you're never satisfied with the work of others, you easily resort to the martyr syndrome. No one else can do it right, so the grinch takes on responsibility for everything. Then he's stuck with too much work, further straining his abilities to do a good job.

I've fallen into that bad habit myself in many arenas. Superwoman is one category that easily comes to mind. Taking yourself too seriously is another. Being the best at everything is impossible, and spreading yourself too thin simply leads to mediocrity.

Our office grinch assumes responsibility for just about everything in the paper. And a newspaper, which is put together by scores of people down the line, is bound to contain errors. One can retract when necessary, but sometimes you simply have to roll with the punches.

Last week, a midnight-toiling photographer inadvertently identified the Mercy high basketball coach incorrectly in rather large type. It was a ghastly mistake. But hopefully the coach won't place the blame on sports editor Tom Baer, who's been covering the Mercy girls for four years and knows the coach's name as well as how to spell it.

Our office grinch, however, finds catastrophe in every error. But I'm finally beginning to learn that rehabilitating the past is a waste of time. If I can learn from my own errors, great. But if there's nothing to be gained from certain mistakes, so be it. It's yesterday's news.

I WISH our grinch could walk into 1978 with a better frame of mind—not only for his sake but for the rest of us as well.

I've also learned that office morale is important, particularly at deadline time when the pressure's pretty heavy already. Constant griping is destructive and futile, and like the boy who cried wolf, the complainer isn't taken very seriously when he or she just might have something really serious to complain about.

Does it sound like I'm a slow learner? Maybe I should have inhaled that message some years back, but I've certainly run into enough adults with the perfectionism affliction to know that age doesn't carry maturity.

The American playwright Lillian Hellman once turned to her lifelong companion Dashiell Hammett and said: "We've done fine, haven't we?" near the end of their time together.

The dying and still cynical Hammett replied: "Fine's too big a word for me. Let's just say we've done better than most."

I'm paraphrasing the conversation Ms. Hellman detailed, but I think the grinch should get the message. Maybe a few others can carry that one into 1978 as well.

According to my unofficial survey, most New Year's resolutions are broken within 15 minutes into the new year. Well, don't let it get you down. Instead of making resolutions you are sure to break—and then suffer pangs of guilt—the answer is to come up with some unbreakable resolutions. I call it my resolution solution.

Here are some of my new resolutions, just to give you an idea. But please, feel free to alter these to meet your own demands. Better yet, improve.

Anyway, this year I resolve to . . . Only drink on special occasions. To consider every day a special occasion.

Never argue with anyone—unless I know I'm right (and I usually am). Only watch television when something "good" is on.

Change my attitude towards what

constitutes a "good" television program.

Never discuss the merits of psychiatric treatment with Idi Amin.

Never play cards with a man called "Doc," never eat in a place called "Mom's" and never chew tobacco in an elevator.

I ALSO resolve to . . .

Eat my vegetables when my mother visits.

Invite my mother over for dinner less often (sorry Mom).

Improve my typnig and spelling.

Keep my thermostat turned down to at least 72 degrees and only use my car for necessary trips. Any trip that is too far to walk is a necessary trip.

Be kind to all people—unless I'm in a bad mood.

Save all the money I don't spend and spend all the money I don't save.

Go to church more often. (It won't be hard to break this year's record.)

Always eat at least one meal a day and sleep at least four hours a night.

Only worry about important things—if I could just decide what's important. Ignore all resolutions that would require me to change my habits or my lifestyle.

THERE'S STILL more resolutions available for those who find the above too strict. You can, if you wish, resolve to . . .

Never play ping pong in China.

Only eat foods that are good for you. Of course, you decide what's good.

Always wear matching shoes, socks that are the same color and hats that fit.

Keep matches away from children and cats away from canaries. Also, don't let the dog chew on the sofa and never bring elephants into the attic. (Let them store their trunk someplace else.)

Try to spend more time reading and more time exercising. If that's not possible, at least read about exercising.

And above all, never forget the primary rule of civilized man: "Shake Well Before Using."

### Story on adoption brings inquiries

Dear Editor:

I want to thank you for an excellent article on Adopted Parents of International Children printed on Nov. 24 in your paper.

It was very well written and explained our deepest-heart feelings for our special children.

We have received many inquiries since then.

Thank you again for coming out and spending so much time with us.

CHERYL BOGER,  
2320 E. Newell Circle  
Farmington



### Sorry about that

Boy, did we goof. Farmington Our Lady of Mercy's girls' basketball coach is named Larry BAKER, not Larry Brown as was stated in the Dec. 22 edition of the Farmington Observer. In last Thursday's paper, page 4 of the sports section was devoted to a photo layout of Mercy's very successful basketball team in the Class A state tournament championship game on Dec. 17. Mercy had just capped a 24-0 season with an exciting victory over Detroit Mumford in the finals at Michigan State University's Jenison Fieldhouse. We apologize for the error.

## READERS' FORUM

Letters must be original copies and contain the signature and address of the sender. Limit letters to 300 words.

A Division of  
Suburban Communications Corporation

Philip H. Power  
Chairman of the Board

Richard D. Aginola  
President

Chief Executive Officer

**Farmington Observer**

Steve Barnaby  
Editor

22170 West Nine Mile  
Southfield, MI 48075  
(313) 352-2400

John Reddy, General Mgr.

Arthur Langer, Advertising Director    Fred J. Wright, Circulation Mgr.