

# Tinkering Around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

## Dancing in the streets

"Saturday Night Fever" wasn't on my list of movies to see but I found myself being ejected into going to view it.

As part of a private celebration a few weeks ago, a select few of us misplaced suburbanites smuggled popcorn into the late late show, expecting to cop a few giggles and see some fancy dancing.

We had our share of both, but somewhere along the way, we found ourselves taking a brief and vicarious visit into our childhood neighborhoods.

It garnered the same reactions from us, say, meeting an old, long-time college boyfriend at a party—a combination of surprise, curiosity, and relief at knowing you aren't going back home with him.

At this point, I ought to interject a little synopsis of the movie, in case you've escaped hearing about it. Basically, besides exhibiting a lot of dancing that you'd never find in the streets back home, the movie does take a glance at a young man going through the process of leaving one side of town to take a crack at the other, more affluent part of the city.

ALONG THE WAY, he meets up with a young lady trying to be tough and who's working hard to forget the old side of town.

Not that they live in such a bad area. But like everyone I've known who wanted to quit living in an area where the factory was a large part of the economic and social life, you can begin to see them get claustrophobic.

There ought to be more choices than getting married at 18, raising kids who'll wind up playing in the streets because the park's taken over by the neighborhood gang, and watching the old man come home every night carrying

ing his metal lunch box with the giant size thermos of coffee.

If father really has had a bad day, then the kiddies get their meal fed to them quickly followed by the bun's rush out the door so peace and quiet can reign in the house.

So, after viewing this scenario, with variations for 20 years, it's no wonder the kids decide to escape somehow.

In our neighborhood, we had a teacher who decided that she was going to help whole droves of us go onto something better.

Of course, at times her advice was a little strange. She advised all of us to Anglicize our last names as much as we could and as soon as possible. It raised eyebrows in Hamtramck to push that advice.

BUT ASIDE from trying to convince us to emulate the best of the DAR, she tried, in a way, to get her class at least look for a moment at alternatives to settling down to a job in a tool and die factory or trudging down to Dodge Main in the morning.

Of course, she also tried to convince us to quit saying "dese, dese, dem, dere" with moderate success. My boss will tell you that she was only moderately successful with me.

The problem with her approach was that she concentrated on facade. If you had a good vocabulary and the right type of name, you'd do all right, in her book. No one ever told her what type of determination and anger it took to leave a place that everyone you knew thought was just fine.

No one ever told her what a Chinese puzzle box of a question could develop if one of her students decided that leaving all of the old neighborhood and the old heritage behind was cheating yourself. She would just call that attitude provincial.

And if you did all the right things, she virtually promised her students a place outside of the small job shops then the kiddies get their meal fed to them quickly followed by the bun's rush out the door so peace and quiet can reign in the house.

Except no one ever told her or the young man in "Saturday Night Fever" that they'd find people who were far from willing to make a place for them.

OUR TEACHER's prize student was our ringleader. He had the most blase, Grosse Pointe manner this side of East Eight Mile. And his vocabulary was all the good teacher could ask.

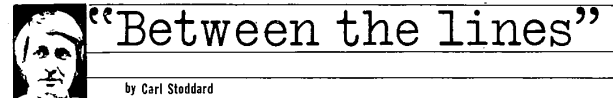
Except that instead of draping his drawing room manner around the water cooler and desks of a clean office downtown, the young man decided that it was no use. He draped himself around the coolest drinks in the neighborhood until he was 21 and was killed in a head-on collision on a street that was far too narrow for two-way traffic.

Her second runnerup was another young man who was the best artist in the school. He was talented and finally got a nice job as a commercial artist.

At last, one of the old gang had made it. He belonged to the right professional clubs but managed to stay in the old neighborhood.

Poor teach, just wasn't destined for success. Her runnerup drowned while on a camping trip. He was 24. The rest of the pack? Well, on Saturday nights, we used to crank up a transistor radio and dance on the sidewalk in front of somebody's house until the neighbors chased us off. We tried to look cool and act slick. That took up a lot of time.

Eventually, they married off; became truck drivers and secretaries and dental assistants. I wonder what teacher has a say about being successful, now?



by Carl Stoddard

## What proper English is

Mrs. Renshaw and I had disagreements about English.

She said diagramming sentences was important. I didn't think so. I said knowing how to identify various parts of speech was important. I disagreed.

I got a D in her English class.

Now, more than a decade later, I get a letter from Mrs. Barbara Schnelbach, a reading teacher at Southfield High School. Mrs. Schnelbach wrote that she liked my recent column about the absurdity of hunting cats with guns.

She also wrote: "It (the column) is being used as part of my final examination at Southfield High School. The students will have to identify the underlined parts of speech, subordinate clauses and prepositional phrases."

Well kids, I wish you luck. I wrote the thing, but I'll be damned if I can take it apart again. Not that I want to.

I have the feeling the Romantic poets didn't get stuck in an English cottage for three days in a blizzard either. If they had, the idealization of the country life might have been squelched.

Cabin fever is a great cure-all.

A frenetic pace heightens the appeal of living on a farm or settling under a palm tree, or any other lethargic fantasy.

But why were the crabbier vibes this side of April 15 running rampant last Monday if the majority enjoyed the slow pace over the weekend?

CABIN FEVER.

There's just so much reading, so much baking, so much relaxing, so much TV watching, so much snow shoveling one can do before the pace slows to an intolerable crawl. And most people can't take it.

Ma Bell's warning to stay off the phones didn't help.

One would expect that a nice, relaxing weekend would put the Michigan world in a good frame of mind last Monday. It just wasn't the case. Ask people who work with the public if you don't believe me. I bet Monday was a record day for

the Queen's English.

I DO, however, question an educational system that places more emphasis on the mechanics of the language than on the ability to use it properly.

Logically, rules governing the English language should help standardize the language and make it easier for all to communicate. We must all speak and write in the same language.

But where is it written that some way of connecting a sentence is proper while another way isn't? It's written in English textbooks, that's where. And who writes English textbooks? Most English professors who know more about conjugating than communicating.

"Why are you doing this, Johnny?"

"Because I'm supposed to."

Did you understand Johnny's response in that exchange? Of course you did, because what he said is a common expression understood by grade school drop-outs, journeymen and even most professors of English. But sticklers will tell you it weren't real good English.

So what? English was invented for the sole purpose of communicating. If

it fails to communicate, it fails. If it communicates, it succeeds.

You will find examples of failing English in college textbooks, governmental reports, political speeches and some newspapers. Good English is all the other stuff that we understand.

PAY ATTENTION, now. This is where I backtrack. First of all, I admit there is a need for rules in English. It's easier to understand the territory when you have a roadmap. And, of course, you must know how to read the roadmap.

You do not, however, have to memorize every city and street on the map or be able to describe in detail the difference between a secondary road and a limited-access highway. All that is required is that you be able to find your way to your destination.

The same is true of English. You must have a grasp of its function and be able to use it to reach your destination. Once you have accomplished that, then you can go back and learn the finer points.

Mrs. Renshaw, to be sure, would disagree. But at least that would mean she understood what I said. It would be a small victory, but I'd take it.

## Smoke detector ordinance blasted

Editor:

We would appreciate the opportunity to respond to the issue of mandatory smoke detectors. We object to the mandatory provision of the proposed ordinance in the City of Farmington.

The smoke detector is an excellent addition in the field of fire safety, but the proper placement and maintenance is a most important factor for safety.

We feel that a well-planned and organized adult fire safety program will accomplish the same results, with the full cooperation of homeowners within the community without this ordinance.

Your article on Dec. 22 failed to mention the admission by the City of Farmington that their safety education program is a failure. This admission in

the presence of the council member, who is an excellent educator, was ludicrous.

We have been a city resident for seven years and have never seen or heard of an ongoing fire safety program. All such programs should be available to schools, senior citizens, adult residents and community groups.

This ordinance provides for enforcement with penalties of 90 days in jail or \$500 fine or both. You editorialized that it will take a while before the majority of homeowners will comply, but you overlooked the requirement that single dwellings shall comply within one year.

This places an undue burden on the elderly on a fixed income to purchase, install and maintain the detectors. No

provisions were made for the poor, indigents and welfare recipients.

Courts have held cities liable for failure to properly inspect certain premises, when failure to do so resulted in injuries to innocent third parties.

No provision is made for the concerned homeowner presently protecting his home with smoke detectors, tested under United Laboratory standards.

The ordinance specifies UL standard 212, that was effective July 5, 1977, thereby making all existing detectors obsolete by date and not function.

Our survey disclosed 70 per cent smoke detector coverage in private homes without adult education programs or a mandatory ordinance. Our residents took the initiative for their own safety, but we found only 25 per cent had an approved fire escape plan. We need more help and education, and not more regulation and enforcement.

GREGORY MCKENZIE,  
City of Farmington

## Home safety is more than smoke detectors

Editor:

Your editorial of Dec. 12 skinned the surface of the issues surrounding the mandatory smoke detector ordinance as proposed.

Thanks for the benefit of your affirmative reply on the issue of government meddling into the privacy and sanctity of the individual home. Shame on you for trying to scorn the council into passing the ordinance.

You should have researched. Fine professional trade journals will concede that smoke detectors aren't the panacea, but are life safety devices.

All homes should have evacuation procedures and drills for primary and secondary exiting from all areas. Home fire prevention is necessary by maintaining good housekeeping and eliminating fire hazards.

Installing the mechanical life safety device (smoke detectors) are most important, but so is continual and proper maintenance of them.

No provision is made in the proposed ordinance for existing smoke detectors which are excellent functional devices, but were tested under United Laboratories (UL) standard 167 or 168.

The UL standard 217 took effect July 5, 1977 and is specified in the ordinance, thereby making homeowners replace their existing life safety devices.

Your editorial has shown great concern for the safety of the citizens of Farmington within the privacy of their homes. We hope the same concern for your employees as mandated by the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Do you have an organized fire brigade? Do you inspect your fire equipment monthly? Do you have a posted fire evacuation plan and hold drills?

Have you called in a Michigan OSHA inspector to assist you in compliance with the laws for the health, safety and welfare of all your employees? The law requires you maintain a safe and healthful environment for all your employees to work.

FARMINGTON OAKS HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION,  
City of Farmington

Editor's note: Yes to all of the above.

## Fair coverage asked by reader

Editor:

I really think that you should start calling your sports section the North Farmington Sports News.

We are constantly cutting down Farmington High School, despite its efforts and achievements. I think I

speak for both the student body and myself when I say we will continue to support our school despite your poor and insulting coverage of Farmington High sports news.

CECILE GRAZIANO,  
Farmington High School student

## League supports school millage

Editor:

The League of Women Voters of West Bloomfield-Farmington Area supports passage of the four-mill school millage renewal in the election scheduled for Feb. 14.

We feel that passage of this renewal millage is essential to insure a contin-

ued sound educational program for Farmington School District students. It should be emphasized that passage of this renewal will not increase the tax rate, simply retain it at the present level.

MARY LAZARTON,  
League of Women Voters

## Publicity aids foundation

Dear Editor:

Robert and I just arrived home from a rather cold stay in Florida and saw the article in the Observer & Eccentric papers about the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation Theatre Party in Northland Theatre.

We truly appreciate the marvelous coverage you gave to us.

The publicity brought many inquiries about our organization and

made the needs and facts about diabetes more known to the general public.

This is exactly what we need to help alleviate the many complications inherent in this disease and to ultimately find a cure.

We thank you for your help and wish you the best for the new year.

Most sincerely,  
JANE COBB  
Juvenile Diabetes Foundation

## Hors d'oeuvres Cabin fever cures

by Lynn Orr

In an age of technology, it's easy to idealize the simple life.

The 19th Century Romantic poets did it all the time, and Wordsworth's London was far less complicated than it is today. He wasn't escaping from punk rock to enjoy the pastoral countryside.

I have the feeling the Romantic poets didn't get stuck in an English cottage for three days in a blizzard either. If they had, the idealization of the country life might have been squelched.

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One would expect that a nice, relaxing weekend would put the Michigan world in a good frame of mind last Monday. It just wasn't the case. Ask people who work with the public if you don't believe me. I bet Monday was a record day for

crabby callers.

When we're primed for a relaxing vacation, we prime ourselves for a slower pace as well. But we weren't primed. Thursday and Friday were a delightful surprise for those looking forward to some free days off, but by Saturday, the weekend plans had to be tossed as well.

I'm not sure what this whole experience has to say about four-day work weeks. I suspect we could easily accustom ourselves to that extra day for leisure.

But I do know last weekend cured a lot of lingering romanticisms of their visions of chucking city life for the country. If you can't make it through a snowbound weekend, what would it be like with only a trickle of films, theaters, restaurants, discos, and friends around? Perhaps you fill up your time with books, ice skating, snowmobiling, hikes, and skiing.

But don't bet on it. I talked to a northern Michigan bar owner last summer shortly before Labor Day and asked him about the trade.

He assured me that summer wasn't his busiest time. In fact, the dead of winter produced a lot of business.

"Sometimes we don't have room for all the snowmobiles in the parking lot," he told me.

That's gotta tell you something about the pastoral life. It just might be that it's not what we city folk idealize at all.

## READERS' FORUM

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

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## Cystic Fibrosis Foundation sends compliments

Editor:

Congratulations on the wonderful picture and word story of Lynn Pearce and her three children who have cystic fibrosis (Farmington Observer, Monday, Jan. 23). Loraine McClish deserves our compliments.

Thank you for telling the story so effectively.

Sincerely,  
GERALD CHOJNACKI,  
Executive Director  
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation  
Metropolitan Detroit Chapter