

Tinkering Around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY



Time to knock neatniks

Ever since Dante pictured the lost souls condemned to hell standing on their heads in a room full of dung, neat freaks all over the world have pointed accusing fingers at their less than tidy brethren. Neat freaks seem to be under the impression that the present is just a dress rehearsal for the afterlife.

As with most cultists, the fastidious have their own annual rituals and celebrations. The major holiday on their calendar occurs in the Spring. It's called Spring Cleaning. Some experts insist that time of year was chosen to coincide with another major occurrence—come taxes.

That may be because the neat freaks are probably the only ones in the country who aren't forced to crawl through every corner of their homes searching for those elusive shoe boxes filled with financial records. There is an ugly rumor going around that the advanced neat freaks have dated their shoeboxes and photostated all of their gasoline receipts. That can't be true. No one can be that neat.

IT'S IN CELEBRATION of their accompanying feeling of superiority over the rest of us poor slobs who are filled with remorse and frustration over not finding our financial records that the neat freaks decided to have their major holiday at this time.

Like most holidays, Spring Cleaning prompts special festive attire. A neat freak in full celebration can be spotted, ironically enough, by his dusty, untidy appearance. Usually the neat freak (or NF as insiders like to refer to themselves) has managed to find the oldest, most decrepit clothes

available. And in a household where everything is tossed out to avoid causing a clutter, finding anything old and decrepit is an almost laudable feat. NFs from the old school can be spotted by the inevitable apron. Some are crowned with an old kerchief to keep their hair neat and a long time NF isn't too embarrassed to add a scraper, er, mop, to the costume.

It's one of the little mysteries of life that the NF is happiest when he's wallowing in dirt. Give a hard core neatnik a messy room, or better yet, a messy person ripe for conversion, and he's sure his reward has come.

I once had a roommate that was a fledgling NF. She had to be just a novice in the faith or she wouldn't have consented to entertain the thought of living in squalor with me.

BUT SHE WAS country-bred and I always assumed she was used to living close to a natural state.

Every spring, without fail, she would saunter into our quarters and begin scrubbing away at what she deemed was her half of the place. During these fits, I would manage to make myself as comfortable as an untouched corner. With any luck, I could find a chair to sit and watch the proceedings while resting my feet on the coffee table.

I always managed to make time to watch her as she scrubbed and I always assumed she was used to living close to a natural state. One year she put the telephone back where it belonged and it took me a while to figure out the location of that occasional ringing noise.

It's a good thing I did find the phone. I was on the verge of drowning

my alarm clock, so sure was I it had taken on a life of its own.

Usually, my roommate wasn't content to tolerate my rather distant interest in her project. She tried to convert me with the zeal of an early missionary in the tropics.

"Look at that desk," she'd say, pointing in derision at my study corner. "How do you find anything that way?"

I MEMORIZE WHERE everything is," I answered with a sarcasm that was as heavy as the clutter on my desk.

"What are you waiting for—the archeology department to come in and excavate," she'd continue, waving a dust rag menacingly in my direction.

"Yep. They want to learn my method of using the depth of the dust to know when I last looked at my bills," I answered.

"Bah, humbug," she'd answer while she continued to celebrate the great rite of Spring Cleaning.

I was aghast. A whole generation of neat freaks is being created, I thought, horrified. But then, I saw a glimmer of hope.

One of her favorite moments in the day was pinning her little charges in play—usually in the middle of a nice, messy sandbox.

But that was more time ago. A few weeks ago, I ran into my neat roommate on the street. She's teaching kindergarten in a nearby suburb

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But I think it's a matter of stupidity. You see, the salmon's instincts have determined that returning to the place of their birth is the safest way to preserve the future generation. And at their rung on the evolutionary ladder, they can't figure out any other options.

One would think that things might have evolved to the point that the salmon could just as easily reproduce in any dark corner of the river; but they keep plugging away with an attitude of "What was good enough for me is good enough for my roe." Their offspring will fight the same upstream battle and the weak will be winnowed out, assuring the strength of the species.

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Hors d'oeuvres

by Lynn Orr

Millage merits your yes

for preservation of the species.

Taxpayers often vote no on school millages, renewals like tomorrow's election or increases, to express their disgust with taxation. It isn't a novel idea, just capricious; but those same taxpayers like to think they have reasons for voting no, unlike the salmon who just follow their instincts.

I hear all kinds of arguments about school taxes. And they all go something like this: "They can just cut the frills, it's about time we got back to the basics," or "I'm a senior citizen and I can't afford all these taxes," or "Don't blame the taxpayers for the school board's incompetence."

These arguments make about as much sense as the salmon's upstream battle. Are "frills" vocational classes or special education for the mentally handicapped? State law determines a teacher-pupil ratio for many of these classes, and when the school board has to lay off teachers, those classes don't increase in size, they just become smaller in number.

Senior citizens have one of the flimsiest arguments because under Michigan law, there are provisions for property tax rebates for many seniors, provisions which are also extended to other families with qualifying incomes.

AND THE ARGUMENT about over-

spending by the school district has two weak points. Most of the budget is devoted to fixed costs, including insurance, salaries, utilities and supplies. Those taxpayers who raise the cry of overspending might have taken the time to show up at the school board's open study session on next year's budget. There were a handful of people at that meeting who actually bothered to learn first-hand about school district spending.

Tomorrow's election is important to this district's young people as well as the community at large. When your education system starts slipping, the community won't be far behind. And maintaining a top quality educational system doesn't come cheap. If this community was in a basic one-car, one-TV, one-stick-a-month category, there might be some feeble excuse for failing to support our schools. But we're not, and we know we're not. Even though most of us have tightened our belts over the last few years, there is plenty of evidence to show we're doing all right. Our schools won't be, however, unless we renew that four mills we're already paying.

It's peanuts back in our pockets, but it's enough energy for the school district to make that upstream battle a little easier.

m.m.memos

By MARGARET MILLER

It was the end of a busy weekend and I realized that I'd blown it again.

Once more, I had noted that a neighborhood store was offering ear-piercing at a bargain rate, and once more, I had forgotten to stop by and get a couple more holes in my head.

Having taken advantage of those rare opportunities four times around, as each daughter reached the age of our majority, I really have been intending for some time to follow suit.

But I keep missing the opportunity. The girls have mentioned several times that they think it would be a good idea. Then, they say, they think we have a ready-made idea about what to get me on occasions they would demand such gifts.

It's my sneaking suspicion, though, that they think it would be nice to have a different supply of earrings on hand to borrow. And with that thought, I begin to wonder if, after all, I wouldn't be a lot smarter to stay away from the hole-maker.

After all, do I really want to add more to the ongoing earring confusion in the family?

We have now vast collections of matching earrings with wires, but even more vast collections of single specimens. We buy earrings, give earrings, borrow earrings and lose earrings at a pace you wouldn't believe.

We also trade earrings, break earrings and misplace earrings with a dis-

patch that must help keep the economy going. We put them away very carefully and still they disappear, only to resurface in completely unplaceable places.

Our cleaning lady has learned to do her vacuuming very carefully, and still she hears an occasional clank that causes her great anguish.

Still, the great variety of earrings available and acquired have been a great source of fun, and I'm tempted to join them.

But maybe, when I do remember to have my inning with the car-puncher, I'll try starting a new fad. Just think of the supply I'd have at hand if I tried wearing them unmatched.

From our readers

Traffic light is appreciated

Editor:

I can't express how pleased I am to see a traffic light at the Kmart—Orchard Lake intersection. I am happy to think that perhaps my letter to you back in January prompted more attention being given to this hazardous crossroad.

If I am concerned residents would channel their constructive criticism properly, many a problem would reach an effective solution—or at least be brought to the attention of those who can solve the problem.

There is another interesting story that is one of the most dangerous in Farmington Hills. That intersection is Fourteen Mile and Farmington roads. There is no traffic light there. There have been many accidents resulting in death and serious injuries and many hospitalizations as a result of an auto accident there.

Again, I urge the city of Farmington Hills or the Oakland County Road Commission to attack this safety problem head on.

There is no need for surveys or discussions of cost responsibilities. One death is one too many. Let us not wait for a child to be killed or another person being killed or hospitalized with critical injuries.

With the increase of population and more intended residential construction in that sector of Farmington Hills, a traffic light has now become a necessity.

DODIE HARRIS
Farmington Hills

Cooperation urged for tax relief

The taxpayers of Farmington, Farmington Hills, Commerce Township, West Bloomfield Township, Walled Lake and Wixom are being ripped off because the high-priced executives that control the police and fire departments refuse to permit co-operative organizations to control the entire area.

The money saved could be used to repair the roads and to add lanes to Middle Belt and Orchard Lakes—I defy our elected officials to put this proposition on the ballot as should be done in a democracy.

HUGH J. SHELLY
Farmington

Senior housing needs study

Editor:

The Farmington Hills Housing Commission is proposing some changes for our city which obviously are contrary to the desires of a majority of voters. Their proposals are based on the testimony of only persons who will gain from senior citizen housing while the feelings of most residents have been ignored.

I am sure that the majority of voters oppose an increase in the building height limit and multiple housing in residential areas.

City council should take the initiative to meet the needs of senior citizens in a manner which also is fair to the other residents. It is apparent that no one has made a thorough study of the needs of senior citizens and how they can best be met in our city. The council has, in the past, commissioned many studies on issues of importance to our city before going ahead with actions and if senior citizens needs are important, they should receive at least equivalent treatment.

Prior to implementing any new actions for senior citizen housing, the city council should commission a thorough study by some qualified organization to do the following:

•Identify the needs of senior residents.

Pass millage

Editor:

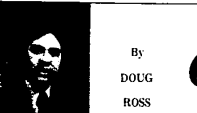
The League of Women Voters of the West Bloomfield-Farmington Area supports the four-mill renewal proposal which will be submitted to Farmington School District voters Tuesday, April 5. The league believes passage of this renewal millage is essential to the continuation of a sound educational program for Farmington public school children.

PAULA TOBOCMAN
President

READERS' FORUM

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

JAMES HOVELL
Farmington



By DOUG ROSS

Citizens can win

Several months ago newspaper headlines warned of yet another chemical threat to children. It is Tris, a potentially cancer-causing, flame retardant chemical used on fabrics for children's sleepwear.

Since those headlines appeared, the Citizens Lobby has been receiving questions from anxious mothers about Tris. Especially questions about how to insure that their children's pajamas aren't treated with Tris, and that new pajamas they purchase are free from this possibly dangerous chemical.

Here are some of those questions and our answers:

QUESTION: Is it known for certain that Tris causes cancer in humans?

ANSWER: Not for certain. Studies by the National Cancer Institute have determined that Tris is a cancer-causing agent in rats. The Cancer Institute is now trying to establish what those results mean for humans. However, some groups like the Environmental Defense Fund in Washington already are convinced of the dangers to humans and are demanding that Tris be banned.

QUESTION: Why was Tris put on children's pajamas in the first place?

ANSWER: After government studies found that young children were particularly susceptible to fire injuries, a federal law was passed requiring children's sleepwear sizes 0-14 to be flame resistant. Tris is one of the chemicals sleepwear manufacturers employed to comply with the law.

QUESTION: How can I tell whether the pajamas my children are now wearing contain Tris?

ANSWER: At the moment there is no certain means of identifying Tris-treated garments. But here are some facts that will help you tell whether your children's pajamas might be treated with Tris:

•Tris was primarily used as a flame retardant in pajamas made from polyester, acetate and triacetate. Pajamas made from other fabrics are unlikely to contain Tris.

•The law requiring children's sleepwear to be flame resistant went into effect July 1972 for sizes 0-6 and May 1975 for sizes 7-14. Pajamas purchased before these dates probably do not contain Tris.

•If older pajamas still have the label inside, it ought to tell whether or not they are flame resistant. If not, the garments probably contain no Tris.

QUESTION: How can I avoid Tris-treated garments when I buy my child new pajamas?

ANSWER: Many new spring and summer children's pajamas now bear labels saying they don't contain Tris. Also, certain fabrics are inherently flame-resistant and, therefore, would not contain Tris. Such fabrics include modacrylics, cordelan and matrix. Also, fabrics such as cotton and nylon are treated with other chemicals than Tris to make them flame resistant.

Another option is to buy garments not officially considered sleepwear, such as long underwear, which aren't treated with any fire retardant chemicals.

Finally, when in doubt about the possible presence of Tris in pajamas, question the sales person in the store where you are shopping.

My Cup of Tea

by Loraine McClish



An owl-eyed look at dawn

I accepted a job last week for our Detroit Chapter of Women In Communications and have been looking forward to it. But a few days ago I learned that the job called for me to be downtown by 7:45 a.m. on a Saturday morning. It's been like a sword hanging over my head ever since.

I am an owl person, and suffer with my fellow owls, on getting with and into anything that is going on in the early hours of the day.

I learned to use the word owl to describe my condition from a nephew, a relative who worked his way through

Chicago University by sleeping, and being awakened, and having his eye movements recorded in the sleep laboratories there.

When we visit, he tells me of the lab's activities and some of the scientists' names.

Some of those same scientists have written books. I've read a lot of them on their progress to see if they've stumbled onto something I could use for my owl problem.

As far as I know, we are recognized sufficiently for them to have labeled us larks or owls but that is about all.

I'VE RECOGNIZED myself as an owl early. I was always one of the first kids in school to get my term schedules set with all the snap courses pinned down to morning hours, leaving the afternoons open for those courses difficult for me.

Even then, it occurred to me that somewhere in the world there might be an owl surgeon scheduled for an early morning operation. Or a lark pilot on a night flight.

Or maybe a traffic accident, somewhere, that occurred when either a lark or an owl driver should have been in bed.

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