

editorial opinion



Hors d'oeuvres by Lynn Orr

Spring fever's pitch

"My head's spinning in all directions," one of my colleagues said last week. "I honestly believe spring is the worst time of year for dealing with problems."

I think she's right. More suicides occur in the spring than at any other time of year. Manic-depressive types go into the hospital. If we had an emotional barometer, the highs and lows would probably set records during May.

I think weather may have something to do with it in a peculiar way. During the winter, one can blame depression on weather—it's a good reason as any, probably better than what's actually behind the black times. But when the climate finally (finally, finally, finally,) turns pleasant, you're face to face with your problems, lacking that snowy arbitrator.

All the tasks that have been procrastinated during the gray months pop up in the most unexpected places. You're supposed to be concentrating on the day's task, and instead find yourself tying up your brain in knots over last night.

I'm convinced that personal relationships suffer the most. Romantic entanglements in particular hinge on the emotional states of those involved.

When the moods fail to coincide, the friction increases. I guess when the mood swing is more pronounced, the likelihood of "being off" gets pushed up a notch. Why else would all the bars be filled with lonely people on a warm spring evening?

If YOU'RE looking for answers, save your eyes and your time and quit reading. I'm strictly an observer and participant in this annual exercise. Unlike many other columnists, I'm without a nifty book to throw in about this time. I'm merely wondering what it's all about.

I can throw in a few tricks I've learned to avoid a collision course. Avoid sitting around listening to moody records with a drink in one hand and a hand-rolled cigarette in the other. Mood elevators only seem to work when the mood is up at the beginning.

Poetry is another area for abstention. Getting further in your mind when you're low produces an analytical backlash.

Maybe that's why a great majority of us throw ourselves into sports, spring cleaning and other physical activities.

It does seem to work some of the time. But I've a feeling it's another easy out, like winter weather. We spin our wheels doing the mundane stuff and never getting to the bottom of what's really messing up the mind.

Some people advise really getting into depression as a learning experience, shutting everything else out and sifting through the real pain. That may be an answer. Obviously if one can pinpoint the source of trouble, one also may be able to consider some solutions, alternatives, or even avoidance tactics. But the general behavior indicates that just about everyone takes care of the sideline stuff and neglects the major issues.

Perhaps the big stuff is overwhelming, unless you get at it one at a time. Sift through the goop and isolate one of the key problems and work from there. Sounds like good advice, but as my colleague says, "Good advice is the easiest thing in the world to ignore, especially when my head's spinning."

A good bakout in the sun may be the answer if Mother Nature cooperates, except I'm not too crazy about ultraviolet light and wrinkles. Perhaps a good bakout in the shade?

tinkering around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Planting seeds of failure

If there's such a thing as a brown thumb, I have one.

My luck with houseplants is so bad that if plants ever fulfill every science fiction writer's dream and take over the world, I'm in real trouble. Every plant I've ever owned has wilted away, even as I attempted to keep it alive.

Friends who give me plants to nurture and cherish are constantly reassuring me that their gift is foolproof.

The last time a friend gave me a plant, she recited its history to me. It came to the Detroit area as a mere cutting found on a backpacking excursion somewhere in the Rockies. From there, she cared for it until it grew up into a gorgeous bush. Then, she managed to obtain cuttings from it to pass on to her friends.

Touching, isn't it? Like getting a dog with a pedigree.

Well, the plant died in a week once it got into my unfortunate clutches.

That was six months ago and my friend is still asking about the progress of her indestructible plant.

I hate to tell her the truth. It's like getting a puppy for Christmas only to have it die before New Year's.

YOU HATE to tell your benefactor that the gift quit giving.

So, there I am with the brownest plant ever to grace the most neglected corner of an apartment balcony.

I almost feel I ought to give the plant a decent burial.

My luck with plants has been consistent. Years ago when I knew a man who insisted I had the makings of a good gardener. I used to have an apartment filled with the green things.

Whenever I botched something, he came along and fixed the plants for me, reassuring me that next time I would know what to do.

Except the same thing never happened twice to any plant I owned. Once my geraniums developed a white fuzz on the leaves. I thought that was perfectly all right. Maybe they're supposed to look that way. But my friend managed to diagnose that problem fairly easily.

"How come you let the aphids take over?" he demanded.

"Aphids? Avid about what?" I asked.

Well, three doses of garden spray later, I had come to realize there are such things as little white and green bugs that prey on plants.

IT WAS too late for the geranium though. They hit the dirt.

The only plant that thrived for me was a coconut tree that was fed the drops of coca-cola glasses for months. When we had a sudden attack of consciousness and gave the plant straight water, it died.

So, now what do I do this spring but start to write about gardening. That's like letting a butcher write about brain surgery.

From our readers

She agrees—sneezing is a snafu

Editor:

Have had your article, "Study sneezing for a safer America," (April 20) sitting amid the clutter on my sewing-type desk for some time, because I thought it deserved serious comment. You're right—sneezing IS a traffic hazard.

Just in case you should get that federal subsidy to study this phenomenon, here's a big of heretofore undocumented proof:

About 28 years ago on a dismal, drizzly day in going-home rush hour traffic heading north on Yonge St. in

Toronto (they were just starting construction on the subway), we were inching along in stop-and-go fashion when my husband was seized by a tremendous sneeze.

Just as his eyes closed, the car in front of us stopped. Simultaneous with the "kerchoo" came a slight jolt, followed by the sound of headlights glass make when they fell to the pavement. (I shudder to think what could happen at today's speeds, "barreling down the expressway.")

WE WERE lucky. When we got out

(embarrassed as hell) to investigate the damage, our car was the only one that sustained any. The other driver, after ascertaining that his bumper had indeed done the job it was designed for, shook his head and drove on.

When I read your article, I thought the "hear, hear" and "amen," because my husband is the classic sneezer you described. He has tried everything to no avail to stop the sneezes, but has rather cleverly learned to take his foot off the gas, grip the steering wheel tightly, brace himself and KEEP HIS EYES OPEN when he feels one coming on while he's driving.

At any rate, now you can tell Rochester Chief Robert Werth that you have documented proof that it has happened—so there.

I always enjoy your "Through Bifocals" column, and Tim Richard always has something interesting to say, too. That same day he proposed a terrific idea—that they should "teach photography on TV," which I will think of every time I get back a packet of shots that I thought would be terrific and turned out from somewhat less. Pass along a "hear, hear" and "amen" to Tim for me on that one, will you?

BEA SCAGLIONE,
Farmington

Residents deserve a dust control choice

Editor:

Steve Barnaby asked in his editorial regarding the public hearing on non-paved roads: "Now, if it were a necessity, why were a few persons allowed to bug out?"

What does "it" refer to—"the necessity of chlorinating the roads to control dust during the summer months" or "the necessity to control dust during the summer months?"

We neighbors on Oxford, Collingham, etc. have taken care of this problem of controlling dust on our roads at the REAL grass roots level for at least 20 years or so. We have taken turns collecting money and making arrangements for the application of oil on our roads each year.

Reader clarifies

Social Security

Editor:

As they say, "let's set the record straight," before some fallacious information is disseminated and believed.

It may be true that most retirees will get more in benefits than they paid for in the form of taxes, but in fairness, two points must be made. A person who pays in is being paid back in devalued dollars. What is the inflation rate over 40 years.

Even several hundred dollars put aside a year at a low interest rate compounded over 40 years equals a big sum.

In fact, in 1968 it was figured that a person putting in the maximum amount over 40 years of a working lifetime would have accrued \$63,000. At the Social Security monthly payment at the time, it would have taken a return on the age of 103 to receive a return on what he had put into Social Security.

Social Security as a system, takes much more than it will ever return. Furthermore, it wasn't intended to be retirement funding, but a supplement.

Social Security could easily remain solvent as a retirement system. It becomes difficult as a disability and health system. If Medicare and Social Security disability were taken from the general fund, Social Security could be solvent at a much lower rate of deductions for the next 150 to 200 years.

JOHN BERGMAN,
Farmington Hills

One year we did try the county program of chloriding—but were dissatisfied—so have had oil applied at our own expense ever since—even when the new City of Farmington Hills provided chloride for those streets that wanted it. So we are only "opting out" of governmental chloride program—NOT the dust control; the council is wisely giving us the choice.

I ALSO wish to commend the City of Farmington Hills for the great improvements that have been made in the condition of the roads in Sections 35 and 36, especially since becoming a city. No longer do we get stuck in the mud in spring; the streets are well-drained where necessary, and the city workers attempt to keep the chuckholes filled in.

KAY BRIGGS,
Farmington Hills

READERS' FORUM

Letters must be original copies and contain the signature and address of the sender.

Limit letters to 300 words.

We did it again

Dear Editor:

You have done it again. The newspaper coverage this year for National Music Week has to be one of the best, if not the very best.

Your photographers have captured the expression of happiness and enjoyment in every picture. The Farmington Observer coverage for Farmington Musicale has been this year, for all our activities.

I just want to thank you personally because it appears that you have a great interest in the arts and in particular, the Farmington Musicale.

We're looking forward to another good year.

Sincerely,

BEVERLY NOTESTINE
Farmington Musicale

Barbers get the business

Editor:

We noted with pleasure your recent feature article on the women barbers, Karen Durian and Mary Haladay, of Farmington.

Women in the barbering field are increasing rapidly as more women become aware of the greater income available to them as barbers, rather than cosmetologists. I just wanted to let you know that the governor's recent appointments to the Board of Barber Examiners now give that board a female majority for the first time in history. The public member serving on the board is female, and there are a woman journeyman and a woman owner serving with two male owners.

Although it took some time to determine, I am afraid that Ms. Durian and Ms. Haladay are not the first woman owners in Oakland County. Our list of establishments shows at least three other women with establishments and at least a half-dozen or more who have had their own establishments that are now inactive.

I guess the bottom line of the entire story is, as you said, said, that "the majority of male customers want a good haircut, regardless of who cuts it."

That is the essence of equal rights for everyone—the right to have the job done to your satisfaction. Lynn Orr has done a comprehensive story on barbers, on women barbers, and on women entering ownership of businesses.

WILLIAM S. BALLENGER,
Director,
Department of Licensing
and Regulation
State of Michigan

The Flip Side
by craig piechura

I'm in limbo over purgatory

I ought to say, right at the outset, that I am not out to insult anyone's religious convictions.

I'm not saying your beliefs are wrong and I'm right. However, that doesn't mean I will not attempt to come to grips with my own spiritual shortcomings at everyone's expense.

I think Mark Twain said that. With all that aside, there was a Harris poll the other day that said something like one-third of all Catholics no longer believe in the notion of eternal damnation. Fire and brimstone are down on the credibility scale than Jimmy Carter.

Hell? I don't care that much. I don't plan to visit the place.

But as a product of 12 years of Catholic schooling, I wonder if the concepts of purgatory and limbo will bite the dust.

For Catholics who have been away so long they forgot, and the Judaic and Reformation crowd, let me explain.

Purgatory is a temporary hell. It is a minimum security detention center for people who committed misdemeanor sins. Kind of a cosmic way station with a faulty thermostat.

At St. Rita's you helped people get sprung early from purgatory by praying for their souls the day after Halloween. It's hard to be devout when your pockets are full of malted milk balls.

LIMBO, as I see it, is a permanent waiting room with naphthalene chairs and copies of Holiday Magazine and Jack and Jill strewn around an end table.

Limbo is populated by pagan babies, Watasi warriors, Communists, and anyone else who didn't make a sincere act of contrition upon expiration.

Without baptism, they were destined to an eternity in limbo. As Chubby Checker would say, "Limbo lower now, how low can you go?"

But there was hope for the pagan babies. You could "buy" pagan babies from the Holy See for \$5 each and the baby you "bought" would be fed, baptized and given an American name like "Mark."

There's gotta be a lot of Korean kids named Mark running around right now without fear of going to limbo.

But back to hell and the Harris poll. Who populates hell? The only guy who were sure was there, according to St. Rita grade school theologians, was Adolph Hitler.

The vote was divided on whether Nikita Khrushchev was on his way.

Now that I am presumably "grown up," I'm sure, if there is a hell, it is heavily populated with service station mechanics.

Not to steal a joke from George Carlin, but here goes. He wondered if people who were sent to hell for eating meat on Friday—an offense that used to be a mortal (heinous) sin—got a reprieve when the Church changed the law.

Otherwise, he said, there are people burning in hell, doing eternity for a beef jerky.

For the carnivorous Catholics who wanted to stay out of hell, they introduced tuna fish hot dogs as a Friday substitute.

Frighteningly lousy, even for a kid's diet. But it's food for thought. If Jesus had multiplied hot dogs and buns instead of loaves and fishes, he would have invented the picnic at the Sermon on the Mount. And using the phrase "hot dog" in vain would be a profanity.

All right, all right, I'll back off on the sacrilegious stuff. I can't help it. I think my problem stems from the time I almost choked to death doing a cannonball on my parent's spring bed.

They were not at home, of course. I was wearing a scapular around my neck. A scapular is a brown piece of felt, blessed by the priest, worn around the neck on a shoestring to ensure its wearer certain salvation.

But I tucked my legs into my chest to form the cannonball. I hooked the loop of the scapular around my knees. I hit the bed, bounced and gagged. Now, if I had died at that young age I probably would have gone straight to heaven even though I died disobeying my parents. But, as fate would have it, God did not want me to enter his kingdom with a red mark around my neck.

I exchanged the scapular for a rosary that glowed in the dark.

I no longer own a rosary that glows in the dark. But I do own a Frisbee that glows in the dark and I spend my Sundays reading three newspapers.

I don't know what that proves, but it looks like I'm in for a prolonged stint in purgatory to make up for my wayward ways and means. And this column isn't going to boost my grade point in the Big Book.

I'm checking this paper's want ads for a good deal on asbestos underwear.

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