

editorial opinion

Dick Westlund writes

History lives in papers

Breeding through the pages of Westlund's abridged dictionary the other day, I came upon a good definition of journalism: "History in the present tense."

Today, I'd like to take a few minutes and reflect on what I and thousands of other reporters and editors do for a living—tell you what has just happened in your community and what may occur in the future.

I've always thought the past was important in trying to understand the present, even before I became an American history major in college. And while historians report on events of years ago, journalists examine events of days ago.

Aside from the differences in time, I think the professions are much the same, looking at elements of change and stability in the past, with an eye out for what may happen in the future.

Usually what a newspaper reports has a lot more impact in your life than a history book does. Stories about local property tax increases or even what movies are coming to town next weekend show that kind of importance.

But by sacrificing immediacy, historians often gain greater depth. With a longer perspective, they can see past the peaks and valleys of day-to-day events and look at some of the long-term trends in our society.

For instance, many of the broad problems Americans are wrestling with in the 1970s—ecology, conservation, of resources, how best to develop the economy—were vital issues back in the 1840s, more than a generation before the Civil War.

This is just an example of how decisions that were made decades ago still influence us and are still alive as issues.

There are many ways that newspapers and history books provide us all with answers. But let's take a little different perspective and look at the questions they ask.

In many ways, history books define our past. What the historians consider important gets into our textbooks and what they leave out somehow never "exists" in quite the same way.

It's no wonder that blacks, women, homosexuals and other groups are searching for their roots.

History used to be just about kings and queens, lords and ladies.

It's only been in the past 50 years that historians have taken a look at the larger social movements and issues that they dismissed for centuries as unimportant.

This shift in historical viewpoint has had a great impact on the present, for history lends an idea, an institution or a person a sense of permanence, of tradition.

One of the hardest tasks we all face is looking at a future that seems increasingly uncertain or unpleasant and a present that changes from day to day.

What history can do is provide an anchor when the winds of change blow around us.

Now, through history, but also through journalism, more and more people are learning that they have a past, that they are important in the present and that they and their children may count for something in the future.

Journalists of the past have been guilty of many of the same sins historians have long committed.

How much political reporting of the past has dwelt on the candidates alone—what they said, who their sidekicks are and even what they had for breakfast in the morning?

It's only been in the past 10 to 15 years that journalists (sometimes) are writing about the voter.

And what's on the voter's mind, in an election year, is a lot more important than anything else.

That new sophistication showing up in newspapers and history books will have a long-term beneficial impact that won't ever be able to be measured.

But society is not the only thing to benefit from the new directions.

Journalism and history are more alive today than they ever have been. There is conflict over how to go about reporting on community events and there is conflict about how to examine things that occurred hundreds of years ago.

And that divergence of viewpoints is healthy for everyone, for out of disagreement comes new understanding.

Let that be the moral to this column.



"Around the edge" by Jackie Klein

Kids age moms quickly

The sign of our times is seldom so vividly painted as in a dialogue between distressed, defensive, disappointed, doting and disapproving mothers.

In the discourse, their kids come off as drug-addicted, teenage dingbats, misbegotten, hippy sanitation department rejects or future brain surgeons, depending upon who's doing the interpreting.

Recently, I overheard these mini-packet of life observations about the now generation:

Mother No. 1—"I hear your Jimmy is going to college. So he's joining the rest of those crazy, unrealistic educated misfits. (Sigh.) I wish my Robert were going to be a dentist like his father."

Mother No. 2—"You really can't expect the boy to do exactly what his father does. What is your Robert studying to be?"

Mother No. 1—"He was studying to be a dropout and after six months, he graduated magna cum laude in that subject. Not another penny will he get from me and his father."

Mother No. 2—"What is he going to do? How will he live?"

Mother No. 1—"Don't worry about my Robert. He'll never starve. The girl he's living with has a very good job."

MOTHER No. 2—"What are his plans for the future?"

Mother No. 1—"He's planning to be an executive vice president. But he's waiting for General Motors or Edison to come to him while he's busy finding himself. After all, my Robert doesn't want to start at the bottom."

Mother No. 2—"How will he support his wife? Aren't he and his girl friend engaged?"

Mother No. 1—"Oh, no, my Robert doesn't believe in long engagements. He doesn't even believe in short marriages. He says commitments are gross and off the wall. Besides, he was going to Europe to find out who he is—under a backpack."

Mother No. 2—"Well, it could be much worse. He could be on drugs."

Mother No. 1—"Oh, he was when we were supporting him. But he and his father figure two can live as cheaply as one as long as one doesn't smoke pot."

Mother No. 2—"What is this generation coming to? In our day, if you recked in the back seat of a car, you were considered a tramp. I guess we're just lucky with our Jimmy. He's a chip off the old block. But he's not going to be an ordinary doctor like his father. He's going to be a neurosurgeon. What do you mean BS? Oh, bachelor of science. That's just one of the degrees he'll get."

MOTHER No. 1—"I can hardly wait 'til Robert is a father so his kids will make him suffer like we're suffering."

Mother No. 2—"At the rate he's going, you may not have long to wait."

Mother No. 1 (Indignantly)—"At least my Robert isn't going to college where all those radical freaks are. I'm glad he has a girl friend who's smart enough not to want to be bringing up a kid in this generation. Not everyone is college material."

Mother No. 2—"Speaking of that, material things mean nothing to my Jimmy. He's dedicated to helping humanity. He needs complete privacy in order to study, so he rents a \$300 a month apartment all alone. He has a \$3,000 stereo because he can't relax or fall asleep without music."

Mother No. 1—"My Robert's girl friend keeps a lovely apartment. I can't understand why her parents never come over to visit. Why should they object to their daughter and my son living together when the parents are getting a divorce after 30 years? I hear Robert's girl friend's father has a lover younger than his daughter."

Mother No. 2—"Oh, well, let's not worry about the kids' future. We probably won't be around to see what happens to them. Like I always say, those kids will drive us right into the ground."

Guest Columnist

Kids are feeling the pinch

(Editor's note: Mintzi Schramm is a Southfield resident and a professional writer. In the following guest column she takes a look at that unwanted family companion—inflation.)

By MINTZI SCHRAMM

The topic has become as commonplace as the housefly and just as likeable as the housewife.

Inflation is hitting everyone, forming a common bond between people of different age groups and people from different walks of life. "Hi, How are you?" has been replaced by "Hi, How is it going?"

In our house, as in many others, inflation has become a constant subject of discussion. Just the sight of food on our table is enough to set us going.

"Remember when apples used to be 30 cents a pound?" asks my husband, who frequently helps out with the shopping now that I help out on my income. "They're 79 cents now," he

adds. Never my favorite fruit, apples go down a few more notches in my esteem.

The subject came up again the other day, during dinner. This time, however, the voices of my children were heard—not just screaming about who was hitting whom—but actually talking about the subject at hand.

"I REMEMBER just a few years ago when Lifesavers were 10 cents," exclaimed my 12-year-old. "Now they're 20 cents."

"A carton of milk from the machine at school is 20 cents now," chimed in my 10-year-old, not to be outdone. My 3-year-old did not enter the contest.

Of course, my husband and I, who have a few more years to look back on, remembered Lifesavers and milk at five cents. I won't mention what my mother recalled.

I realized what they were getting for their allowances and wondered why we hadn't been picketed yet. We'd given them merit increases for birth-

days, but had not considered the necessity of including a cost of living clause. Except for plugging parking meters, there's probably little they can do with their incomes. No wonder we get touched for handouts and loans.

A few days later, allowance time rolled around with its incessant regularity. My two older children, having not yet equaled inflation with wages, said nothing about the amounts they were receiving. My 3-year-old also stood in line for her allotment, which I must confess is one penny a week. Before anyone cites us for unusual cruelty to children, let me note that when she has finished sucking her penny, she generally loses it. Money we therefore thought had little value to her.

Not so. When it came Rikki's turn to stretch out her hand and receive the weekly dole, she informed my husband that she wanted a quarter.

Right on, Rikki.

Poor social display during graduation is found appalling

Editor:

On Thursday, June 15, I attended the Farmington High School graduation ceremony. I was appalled at the poor social display by many of the graduating seniors. An important day for some became no more than a pep rally for all.

Clearly, there were no controls or limit settings by administrators nor any restraint imposed when inappropriate actions were demonstrated.

If traditions are to be changed, and many are, then certainly common sense must still prevail. Graduation is not an end but the beginning of the adult world and should be received with some degree of dignity. It is, after all, a combination of academic and social skills acquired through the early years.

Given the circumstance, young adults are capable of poise, pride and dignity. Something has to be very wrong with an educational program to permit the noisy talking, yelling, whistling, waving of arms, cheers, clownish gestures when receiving diplomas, throwing of hats, improprietly worn hats, some not even worn, and even

more distasteful, disrespect during the Benediction.

There is a time for all things, let's keep them in their right perspective. How can we expect sound, responsible adults when we condone irresponsible actions?

This was to be a very meaningful event marred by the lack of proper controls and permitting a chaotic atmosphere. It is hoped that future commencements for Farmington High will be received with just a little bit more honor.

HELEN BECK,
Farmington

Soft drink association not for litter lobby

Editor:

Michigan soft drink bottles are not endorsing or supporting the proposed delay in effective date of the container deposit law and the substitution of a "litter tax."

While the soft drink industry did initially oppose the initiative law imposing a mandatory container deposit system in 1976, we never thought of ourselves as part of a "litter, lobby" (editorial, "Litter lobby's latest" June 1). We are rap-

idly moving to comply with both letter and spirit of the new act which becomes effective Dec. 3.

As indicated in our news release: "The Michigan Soft Drink Association announced it is not endorsing legislative proposals delaying the effective date of the new beverage container deposit law and imposing an excise tax on beverages, cigarettes and take-out foods to finance litter pickup."

"We recognize that the all-returnable system may inconvenience some customers, add to beverage costs and reduce total litter by only a small amount, but we recognize also that a great majority of Michigan citizens voted for this law and our industry is prepared to follow that mandate."

A. DOUGLAS GRAHAM,
Executive Secretary,
Michigan Soft Drink Association.

READERS' FORUM

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



By W.W. EDGAR

The Stroller

Firefighters light up July 4 parade

The last place in the world you would think that a fellow could suffer the pangs of homesickness would be on a curb along Main Street watching the Fourth of July parade.

But that is exactly what happened to The Stroller and it left him with memories of some of the most unusual and colorful parades he ever has seen.

While a group was marching past Plymouth City Hall and had trouble keeping a straight line, The Stroller got to smiling. For it was a last-minute trick to keep the marchers in line in the firemen's parade that helped them win first prize back home years ago. His old home town had the distinction of having the largest and best volunteer fire company in the entire area.

In those days there were no such thing as paid firemen in small communities. Those who fought the blazes that occurred from time to time were volunteers.

They worked for the glory of it. Their only reward was to attend the annual Four County Firemen's Convention and then carry off the top prize in the parade.

This one particular year, the parade was held in the southernmost part of the area. That meant the firemen had to leave early and be dressed in their parade attire, which consisted of a red flannel shirt and a white tie with a black numeral "3" on it.

As we arrived early in the parade town, there were red shirts everywhere—especially in the beer parlors, commonly known as saloons.

To make sure we would be in the running for the main prize—which went to the fire company with the most men in line passing the judges' stand—we sent scouts out to count noses.

The reports came back that our own Southwark Hose Co. No. 9 had the most men in uniform. There was joy in the ranks as our company had taken the prize for several

years and we wanted to do it again to keep up the tradition.

Things were going fine. Everyone seemed to be having a great time. Folks lined the streets in great numbers. Then came a shocking word that a great number of our men had imbibed too freely of the amber fluid and it was doubtful they could do any marching.

Just before the parade started—and our company was far back in the line—we rounded up all the tipsy fellows and had them stand about two blocks from the judges' stand. The next chore was to get them lined up and walking when we reached the officials' stand. Only those in line at the stand were officially counted.

For a time we were nonplused. Then one of the officers came up with a splendid idea. We'd stand the fellows up and have them place their arms over each others' shoulder. That ought to keep them up.

It required a lot of effort. But the plan worked. When the judges' figures were presented, our company won the top prize by a margin of only a few men.

There was plenty of joy in the ranks when our captain was called up before the crowd and presented with the trophy.

That victory left a lasting mark. Every year since then, the marchers from our old company back home have still used the arms-around-the-shoulders technique at the Four County Firemen's convention, held annually on July 4.

It was the memory of that "trick" that caused the Stroller to suffer a pang of homesickness on the streets of Plymouth last Tuesday.

He was wishing he was back home—just to see the volunteers from the Southwark Hose Co. No. 9 walking in the parade with their arms around each others' shoulders.

The memory of the original "trick" will never die.

Farmington Observer

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