

## Monday's Commentary

## Warmth from memories of Christmas

The best thing about Christmas is the memories. Everyone has fond remembrances of Christmas past which bring a warm feeling to the heart and a tear to the eye.

The smell of evergreen mixed with the turkey roasting as it wafts through the air always brings a tingle.

I call it the Norman Rockwell syndrome, named after the recently deceased American painter who recorded on canvas life the way we want to remember it.

ONE CHRISTMAS I remember particularly well. The exact year escapes me. Let's call it sometime in the early 1970s. The memories are crystal clear, especially now that the years have passed and some of those involved are now gone.

A special friend, a gift given and a gift received make it a priceless Christmas memory.

"Why don't you drop over tonight for some Christmas cheer," said Mom about three days before Christmas.

A little early I thought for eggnog and whiskey, usually served on Christmas Eve. Something was up.

My Father, a typically quiet-spoken Englishman, answered the door. An uncharacteristic grin graced his usually docile face.

I was suspicious.

Walking through the door, I eyed my good friends Randy and Patty Potts. The pair had moved to Arizona a few years before and I had

never expected to see them again. I had known Randy for years and he truly was a best friend. Like my Father, I too am typically English and although I have many acquaintances, friends are few and far in-between.

In previous years, Randy and I had given one another moral support through broken teenage romances, struggled through fits of unemployment together as well as the poverty years when I was studying for my college degree.

It certainly was good to see Randy Potts, again. We celebrated wholeheartedly that evening.

His arrival alone made that Christmas one of the more memorable, but there was more to come.

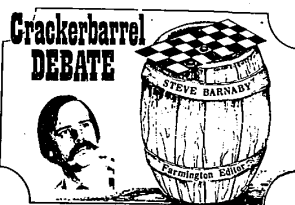
One of my personal Christmas traditions is to find that very special gift for at least one member of the family. Sometimes I find that gift by browsing through stores and coincidentally finding that special gift. Other times I plan for months.

That year, I had targeted my older brother, Clark, for "the" gift.

Clark, you see, is a Marine Corps lifer and in the last 15 years we see one another only every two or three years. Spending many of those years in the Orient, Clark had learned a very complex Oriental game called "Go." In short, it makes Chess look as simple as checkers.

The board on which it is played is about 12 inches thick and has a hole on its underside so that when a player puts down a "stone" it resounds.

American versions of the game are chintzy. I was determined to buy him the authentic board.



I searched, boy, did I search. An obscure Korean gift shop saved the day. God, was I proud and, after the purchase, penniless. But what the heck, I thought, it was worth it.

Christmas morning couldn't come soon enough for me. I had to see him open it.

I wrapped each of the four legs of the Go board separately to prolong the suspense. Finally, he unwrapped a box of the playing stones and the secret was revealed.

There stood two grown men, crying like babies. Even as I write this, the typewriter keys are blurred.

Gramps, a very special person in my life, sat quietly in the corner waiting for me to open the big box with my name on it. I was fortunate to have the American stereotype Grandfather—at last and jolly armed with a sweet-smelling pipe.

"C'mon Steve, open the big box," chanted everyone when it became the sole gift left under the tree.

I pulled the box over to my chair. Inside was a very special gift—my deceased grandmother's manger which had been imported from Italy.

The tears flowed again.

You see, when I was a kid, I was fascinated with the finely sculpted figurines which in my young mind came alive every Christmas. Before my grandmother died in 1968, she had promised that I would inherit that manger.

But since her death, the promise had been swept to the back of my mind. After all, Gramps still enjoyed it every year. But that year the manger became mine until I decided to pass it on to one of my children or grandchildren.

There will never be another gift I will remember with more fondness. Gramp's thoughtfulness was overwhelming.

Today, Gramps is dead, as is Randy, who was killed the next year fighting a fire with the Phoenix Fire Department.

Clark is in Okinawa and another one of my brothers lives in California, serving in the Coast Guard.

But that was some Christmas—one which I shall remember when I smell the turkey roasting in the oven on Christmas Eve.

I'll bet you have a special Christmas you'll always remember.

## The Flip Side

by craig piechura



## Disco song riles the 'Y'

There's a soul song receiving heavy airplay in Detroit and across the nation with the refrain, "It's fun to stay at the YMCA."

The song is No. 6 this week in Billboard with a bullet.

Now you'd think the Young Men's Christian Association would be tickled pink to receive such free publicity. And you'd be dead wrong.

The YMCA is preparing to sue Casablanca Record and Filmworks for trademark violation, according to an association spokesman. The legal department of the record company refused to comment on pending litigation.

The song is performed by a disco group known as the Village People. Their only previous hit, "Macho Man," is a tune celebrating sexual postures.

The Village People has acquired a reputation as a gay group—a reputation that is not entirely accurate, according to Can't Stop Productions, which represents them.

"Being gay is not admittedly the policy of the group," said the Can't Stop spokesman. "Some of the members of the group may or may not be gay. That is not important. The Village People is into people liberation, not gay liberation."

However, a look at the album covers alone—either "Macho Man" or "Guns"—gives some indication of the image being put across.

The first album features group members dressed up in different male role models on the cover. The lead singer sports an Indian headdress, while another is decked out in leather and chains. Still another band member is dressed as a G.I., and another wears the hard hat and flannel shirt of a construction worker.

THE SONG TITLES could be construed as a tipoff. Titles on the first album include "Sodom and Gomor-

rah," "I Am What I Am," and "Key West," also the name of a popular winter watering hole for homosexuals.

"WE ARE MOST disturbed," said John Copeland, vice-president in charge of public relations and urban affairs in the Metropolitan Detroit YMCA headquarters.

"I assume gay people would get some kind of message from the song 'Meet me at the YMCA.'"

Copeland first heard the song performed live on Dick Clark's TV show and thought nothing of it. But he soon received a call from YMCA-New York telling Detroit not to use the song in its programs or publicity because the group had not been granted permission to use the YMCA trademark.

The more the record was played, the more upset the YMCA got, especially when the sexual angle was brought to its attention. YMCA-New York doesn't like to talk about that aspect of the flap.

Our position—and there is only one position we have—is that this is a matter of trademark infringement," said Joe Pisarro, public relations director of YMCA-New York.

"The YMCA name, initials and logo are registered trademarks of the national board of YMCA and cannot be used without the expressed permission of the national board. Neither the performers nor the record company asked for or received permission. They just used it."

THE PARK AVENUE law firm of Morgan, Finnegan, Pine, Foley and Lee has been retained to research the case and report back on the question of trademark violation.

But what of the underlying theme that, as the song states, "They have everything for young men to enjoy; You can hang out with the boys?"

"We're not of the school that says any publicity is good publicity," Pisarro said.

"When they say 'It's fun to stay at the YMCA,' it should be noted that the majority of YMCAs do not have residences. We are most concerned with programming. Many people don't even come to a 'Y' building."

Pisarro said the song also erroneously portrays the YMCA as a male-only institution.

"You should know that out of nine million members, almost 30 per cent are women and girls, amounting to about four million people."

"We couldn't agree more that the YMCA is a place to go, but for different reasons."

The publicity director of Can't Stop Productions said the gay aspect is being blown out of proportion.

Oddly enough, said the production company spokesman, gay discos in New York and San Francisco are boycotting the Village People records. The group is being accused of "selling out" to the straights and ridiculing the gay movement.

Locally, a spokesman for Marjorie's, one of the Detroit area's biggest gay bars, said the song is very popular at the club.

"We boycott nothing," said the bartender. "It's a good song."

"I don't feel they're poking fun at gays or the YMCA. They just wrote a song about it. It's a fact of life. That's where guys go to meet guys. The place is strictly a male establishment."

"You can't put males over females in any establishment and expect them not to enjoy each other's company—in whatever context."

So what kind of impact is the song having on the YMCA?

Negative, if you talk to local and national directors of the organization.

Positive, if you talk to Can't Stop Productions.

"Individual YMCA chapters have written to us thanking us for doubling their enrollment."

Viva la difference.

In the movies old stalwarts like Gary Cooper managed to give a variety of injuries a romantic nature.

Take the classic case of the broken arm. Coop could stand there and bleed. "Oh, yes, shocks, malum, it was nothing." Of course, the malum in question would proceed to utter appropriate sympathetic cooing noises.

Old Coop wouldn't be seen attempting to tie his shoelaces or brush his teeth with one hand.

It's a good thing, too. It would ruin his image for him to be seen asking a young woman if she would tie his shoes for him.

I ought to know. I'm typing this right arm using seven fingers. My column is in one of my desk drawers so I can reach the keys of my typewriter while not disturbing the plaster cast that covers my knuckles and elbow.

And I haven't been able to tie my shoes all week. When I found the last piece of ice on the sidewalk Monday and left, breaking my right wrist, I joined a group of well-known Farmington types who are suffering the same inconveniences. If you think a one-armed reporter is funny, you'll roar at Doug Gaynor, parks and recreation department head, who had his hand in a cast, too.

AND AT East Junior High, Principal Alton Bennett is fielding such remarks from students as "Were you trying to beat your wife?"

Actually, Bennett was in a car accident two weeks ago. He will carry a plaster cast from his knuckles to his shoulder for eight weeks.

In that case, I'm ahead of him. At least I can see my shoulder. But from the elbow down my arm resembles the plaster wall of an old home.

Being one-armed can be a challenge. Ever try to butter bread using only one hand. The plate acts as if it's been possessed by the spirit of Mario Andretti. It zooms across the table as you try to stab enough butter to put on the bread.

And mother told me never to play with my food. Now my food is playing with me.

Bennett's family ends up asking him if he wants some bread and butter. But there are things a family can't remedy.

When Bennett takes his aspirin out of their cellophane packages, he tries to find a secluded corner.

"You feel like an idiot opening them up with scissors," he says.

Bennett, too, shows up at the breakfast table with his shoes untied.

"It's a real hassle," he says.

MY OWN favorite hassle involves household chores. I can't bag garbage one-handed. Nor can I open up a can using one hand.

One morning I wandered into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee, when I discovered that I needed to open a new can.

So I pulled another can of the brew out of the cupboard and got the can opener from a drawer and proceeded to stare at both of those items on the counter. I then realized you need two hands for more things than eating a whooper.

Since I'm right-handed, it's almost impossible for me to get used to writing with my left hand. It took me at least 15 minutes to write a check the other day.

That might not be too bad but I've discovered that you can't comb your hair with one hand. It's almost impos-

sible to do anything with the hair except run a comb through it and hope for the best.

Gaynor, the third member of the club, is in the enviable position of having his cast removed. But while he did have the white plaster on, he was forced to ask his 8-year-old daughter to assist with his top button when he wore a dress shirt and tie.

Harassment was also inevitable.

"You're supposed to be the top jack. Do I have to explain about the vivid comments that I've received?"

FOR THE RECORD, Gaynor joined the plaster of Paris group when he jammed his thumb playing basketball. He tried to soak the thumb but discovered it was swollen the next morning. His doctor took one look at it and Doug was sporting a white plaster glove.

A plaster cast gives you camaraderie with others in the same quandry. It also makes you the target of a lot of sympathetic mutterings.

The salesmen at Sears are particularly sympathetic. They managed to mutter a whole string of "poor girl, try to have a happy holiday" and "oh, yes" over me. At the time this wave of good sympathy was heading my way, I was juggling a cake, a package of drapes, purse and keys while trying to open a door. The men just cooed while I struggled.

Chivalry isn't dead. It's become so much of an antique we now are bombarded with cheap imitations.

By the time I'm finished struggling with my plaster arm, I'm sure to develop a great sympathy for such one-armed types as the man who chased David Jansen in "The Fugitive" television series a few years ago.

## Shirlee's sallies

by Shirlee Iden



Once upon a time, prospective immigrants to this country dreamed of a place where the sidewalks were paved with gold.

For Mikhail Strugach, late of Leningrad, coming to America means a way

to live in freedom with his wife Elena, and a chance to bring up his two sons, Gregory, 8, and Valeri, 15 months. While thousands of Jewish "refugees" still wait for permission to leave the USSR and be reunited with fami-

lies in the west or Israel, Mikhail and his family have made their exodus. They didn't expect golden sidewalks, but they are getting more than they dreamed of, a chance for a brighter future.

## Sometimes a happy ending

Southfield resident Rae Ann Sharfman, longtime fighter for the human rights of Soviet Jews, said Strugach was one of the first activist Jews in Leningrad and had waited more than five years for a visa.

Strugach had some special help in winning his freedom.

The story began over three years ago. Mrs. Sharfman and Dorothy Harwood, a fellow member of Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park, spotted a familiar name on a list of Soviet returnees.

"I got a lot of material from the New York group who works for Soviet Jewry," Mrs. Harwood said. "Every so often they publish a paper with details about how those people are doing and what's happening. On one of those lists I saw the name 'Strugach.'"

"IN ALL the years, I never came across that name before and it's my mother's maiden name. I got Rae Ann to make contacts and we got Mikhail's address."

She, her sister and other relatives corresponded with Strugach, who they learned was the son of her mother's brother, a first cousin.

"We've worked on getting them out ever since," she said. "My sister's congressman, Rep. Jim Blanchard's office and everyone we could get to help."

"Congressman Blanchard read the story of Mikhail's ordeal into the Congressional Record and they worked with us closely."

Congregation Beth Shalom adopted the family as well and wrote letters to them and on their behalf.

Less than three months ago, the Strugach family was allowed to leave the Soviet Union. They were flown to Vienna where they spent about two weeks and then to a center outside of Rome for 2½ months.

"There they got some lessons in English and orientation to prepare them for living here," Mrs. Harwood said.

Strugach and his family arrived at the Harwood home in West Bloomfield at a special time for the family. Julius Harwood was honored that weekend for services to the synagogue, Israel and the community at a bond dinner.

"Mikhail came with us and it was a particularly strange time for him," Mrs. Harwood said. "He was just

overwhelmed by all those people."

I ASKED Strugach if his eight-year-old son understood the significance of the journey from the USSR to Europe and here.

"It was impossible to talk with him about it while we were where because of the intense pressure in his school," he said. Only after they were in the west, he added, could he explain to Gregory why they had to leave the USSR.

Mrs. Harwood is convinced that Gregory will do just fine.

"He'll do the best of all," she said. "He's smart and he's aggressive. We took them to Sears to buy boots for Elena and Gregory said: 'Where's toy?'"

His father told him don't touch the toys and don't go with anyone and for an hour we didn't see Gregory."

Strugach, an engineer, has no money and no job but good prospects. Like generations of immigrants before him, he'll have to start from the bottom and pull himself and his family up by the sheer will to succeed.

He'll find like those who came here before, not streets of gold, but golden opportunity to live as he chooses.

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