

editorial opinion



Downfall of a liberal

A eulogy in the American political tradition was conducted at this week's Farmington Hills City Council session.

And as in any American political event, there were grandiose speeches, much emotion, some wheeling and dealing, and, among it all, a little bit of sense.

The occasion was the removal of Farmington Hills Councilwoman Joanne Smith as a potent political power. Joanne was slated to become the city's next mayor, having served for one year as its mayor pro-tem.

But her political opponents had a different idea and they prevailed.

Joanne is the kind of politician who stirs high emotions among voters. They either love her or can't stand her. Both forces were in play Monday night.

Added to the fray was Councilman Earl Opperhauser, lover of few, compromiser with all. And, as is almost always the case, Earl stroled away with the bag of political marbles, while all the rest stumbled away, scratching their heads, unsure of just what had happened.

It would be tempting to say that the controversy revolved around Joanne's support of zoning for senior citizen and low income housing. But that would be untrue.

The real controversy centered on Joanne Smith, liberal, who for the past three years has stirred the conscience of a community.

In many ways, Joanne is a politician whose day has passed, at least for now. Her political career is being swept away as surely as did the liberal New Politics of the 1960s in which she so strongly believed.

Although she still has a year to serve on the council, a new generation of local politicians will have to pick up the torch of liberalism in Farmington Hills.

But she can walk away feeling proud. Last Monday night a rare thing happened—one person after another stood before the council to praise the ideal which she represents.

I've covered a lot of council meetings over the years and have yet to see such an outpouring of honest praise for a local politician. Ostensibly, her supporters were there to implore the council to elect Joanne Smith mayor. But everyone knew the decision had been made weeks, if not months, earlier.

Some said her public defense was orchestrated. If that is true, it was done with an honorable intention—to pay homage to a friend.

It truly was a dramatic moment in Farmington Hills history.

As for the outcome of the debate, Earl was elected mayor, which he wanted. He won the support of the Homeowners Council to support senior citizen housing, which he wanted.

The recall is dead and the Homeowners Council came away with nothing.

As for Joanne Smith—she has her friends, which is more important than all the rest.

Wrights' lesson

Judges who call secret court sessions, city councils who hold secret interviews with job candidates, education boards who call secret meetings—all can learn a practical lesson from Wilbur and Orville Wright, who 75 years ago this week made the first motorized airplane flight—and tried in vain to keep it secret.

On Jan. 5, 1904, 18 days after they had made world history, the Wright brothers told the world:

...But since the contents of a private telegram announcing to our folks at home the success of our trials was dishonestly communicated to the newspapermen at the Norfolk office, and led to the imposition upon the public, by persons who never saw the 'Flyer' or its flights, of a fictitious story incorrect in almost every detail; and since his story together with several pretended interviews or statements, which were fakes, pure and simple, have been widely disseminated, we feel impelled to make some correction.

The lessons are clear:

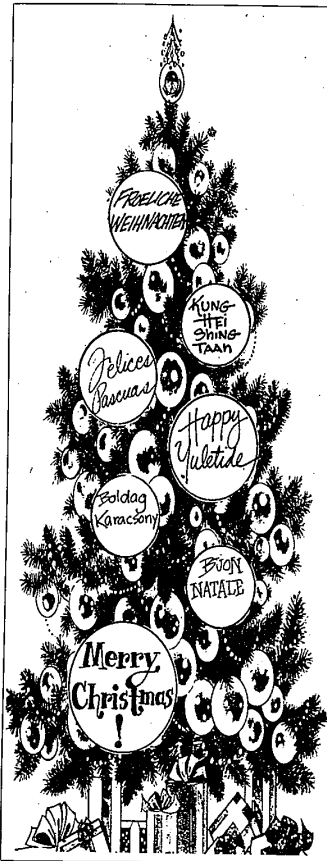
If you try to keep secret something several persons know, someone will leak it.

When news spreads by word of mouth, there will be distortions. In the matter of legal cases, the distortions can be damaging to innocent parties.

The person practicing secret cannot hope to gain.

The public is certainly "imposed on" by official secrecy.

If the Wright brothers hurt themselves and the public by keeping news of their private flights a secret, think how much worse it is for courts to impose gag orders and for policy-making bodies to attempt secret meetings.



A hearty Zalig Kerstfeest and a festive Buon Natale

through bifocals



Bowles, Tom Foley, Pat Foley, Dunbar Davis, Jini Garber, Mike Hand, Gus Cifelli and Carl Ingraham.

FELICES PASCUAL to George Puscas, Herb Boldt, Buddy Puscas, Jon English, Rich Herdt, Tom Moshimer, Ron Holland, Al Fracassa, Bill Rankin, Ken Timmons, George Van Wagoner, John Sandmann, Jack Cotton, Ron Kramer, Monte Clark, Dick Vitale, Jim Rossman and Mike Hohen.

A Toast to Bob Sego, John Conn, Howard Splet, Jimmy & Mary Ann Odum, George Lawton, Dorothy Chandler, Bob Shank, Philip Rodgers Magee, Fred Hill, Uncle Bill & Aunt Jane Clarke, Bob Sincok, Bill Maybury, Esther Hulsing, Judy Leedy, Denver McCord and Woody Hayes. (Woody WHO?)

Kung Hei Shing Taan to Pat Cavanaugh, Cliff Tait, Harper Stephens, Fred Thomann, Craig Bell, Laura Corkum, Bob Rhein, Gary Whitener, Mac McElmurry, Bud Erickson, Paul Carey, Bill Frew and Joseph Priestly McCarthy.

GLAEDIG JUL to Lee Bowden, Harold Guenther, Arch Vallier, Steve Redfern, Pat Hann, Earl Smith, Elton and all the McAllisters, Vern Foster, Jim Bean, Joe & Lois Gilmore, Ned Storton, Hank Meijer, Ed Wendover, Ken Vogras, Dick Molyneux, Ben Creech and I. W. Harper.

Jingle those bells, Santa. Jingle them loud on a midnight clear for Bob Waters, Kathy Himes, Ann Boule, Wayne Weimer, Ruth Koepke, Carl Cederberg and Nat Stibbold.

In any language, and in any religious belief, may the blessings of the season be yours.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

A 1944 Christmas mass that continues

It was late December 1944.

America's Seventh Army in Europe was battling through Alsace, heading towards the Rhine and Germany.

One 23-year-old infantryman, in combat since August, was exhausted.

Then he heard nine words that mustered an inward sigh of relief. An aid station doctor was saying, "I'm sending you back to the field hospital, soldier."

A bumpy ride in the packed GI ambulance seemed like a jaunt in some chauffeur-driven limousine.

THE JOURNEY ended in the square of a tiny Alsatian village. U.S. medical personnel had taken over the local Catholic hospital.

An ancient structure, the building was two stories, complete with a beautiful chapel. It had been run by an order of German nursing nuns until a few weeks earlier.

The infantryman kept thanking God that he was alive. The first two days he slept almost round the clock.

During the afternoon of Dec. 24, word was passed along that the GI chaplain would say midnight mass in the hospital chapel.

By 11:30 that evening, most patients able to walk found their way into the pews. The only illumination inside the chapel came from two flickering stubby candles on the altar.

There was occasional light from outside, when the 155 mm artillery battery cannons near the village fired at German positions. Their muzzle blasts momentarily lit the area and the chapel's stained glass windows came alive, rattled by the concussions.

As the congregation quietly sat awaiting the start of the mass, there was a slight rustling in the balcony of the chapel.

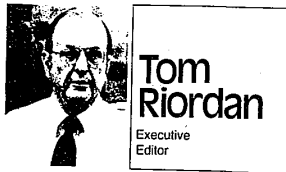
And then a squeaky organ started playing some familiar notes. Every American recognized them. Then it happened.

A CHOIR OF magnificent feminine voices began to sing:

"Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!
"Alles schlief, einsam wacht
"Nur das traute, hochheilige Paar
"Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
"Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,
"Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!"

Chills shot up and down the young infantryman's spine. Time tumbled backwards to a familiar Christmas story he knew so well.

It happened in 1818, when these same words



Tom Riordan
Executive Editor

were sung for the first time. It was in another chapel, not too many miles from where he knelt, at another midnight mass, much like the one he was attending.

The young infantryman silently mouthed the words in English:

"Silent night, holy night,
"All is calm, all is bright.
"Round yon virgin mother and child,
"Holy infant so tender and mild,
"Sleep in heavenly peace,
"Sleep in heavenly peace!"

Tears streamed down his cheeks. So this is what Christmas is really all about, he thought. An emotion he had never felt before welled up within his chest.

WHEN THE PRIEST prepared to distribute communion, there again was movement in the balcony.

Tree heralds Christmas

The fancy tree was ordered from a greenhouse. The big green tree still had to be purchased from a lot by the whole family, and to me this is when Christmas started.

When the tree was selected, everyone had a responsibility. I always had to put it up.

Fortunately, as our son got older, he could help because the trunk never fit in the stand and the tree was always too tall to fit in the room.

After shaving the trunk and pruning the tree, the family had a ritual of deciding which was the best side to face out.

Being the tallest in the family, I put up the lights, but from that point on, the kids took over.

For many years we had to wire up the tree because it was so overladen with goodies.

We probably could have selected any tree around because no one ever saw what the tree really looked like with all the ornamentation.

WE NEVER tried an artificial tree. This constituted an artificial Christmas to us.

While we were trimming the tree, part of the family baked Christmas cookies. So when the job was done, we were really ready for St. Nicholas.

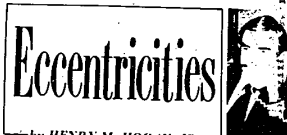
Even when we were away for Christmas, we always had a tree as a sign of the season.

When it came down, we knew the Christmas season was over and the New Year was upon us.

When does the Christmas season start? Some people with long faces say, "Too early." Merchants say the Friday after Thanksgiving.

The season probably starts at different times for different people. For some people, it doesn't even start.

It is something that starts inside you when you



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

make a commitment to think about what you are going to do for other people. This is what the joy of Christmas is all about.

TO ME, THE REAL Christmas season starts when you go out and get a Christmas tree.

When our kids were younger, we all used to go out to a tree farm and search for hours until we found the perfect tree. We would all help cut it down, and it was our own tree.

Then as they got older, we went to a decorator's tree. It was beautiful with its flocking and turquoise lights. Not exactly very Christmasy, but beautiful.

After a while, we called that "Mom's tree" because she was the artistic soul in the family and each child had his or her own small tree with lights and ornaments that fit their ideas of what a Christmas tree should be.

Then we added another big tree which became "Dad's tree." It was great with multicolored lights and basic things like strings of popcorn, candy canes and homemade ornaments. The kind of tree I remembered having as a boy.

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