

Monday's Commentary

Those golden years often tarnished

Tinkering around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

If there's any gold left in the golden years after the age of 60 in this country, it must be spray paint rather than the real thing. And after the Michigan Supreme Court's decision this week to uphold a lower court's closing of a Waterford Township foster care home for the elderly because the facility violates neighborhood deed restrictions, a bit more of the gold has chipped off the American myth that the elderly have a chance to enjoy the retirement years.

Old age used to be touted as the time working persons could sit back and reap the benefits of the years they toiled and scrimped. It was a time to catch up on your reading or take in a little traveling.

But then, inflation made it difficult to stretch the dollar as much as shoppers managed to do so in previous years.

But even that wasn't as bad a blow to being old as the youth mania that seems to have hold on the country. To contend that if you're young you have all the answers and old persons are as much good as old cars is more horrible than writing off youth. For with age comes experience. Wisdom isn't the automatic acquisition of the elderly but experience is.

WRITING OFF THE ELDERLY as incompetent is wasting time-honed talent and abilities.

But that attitude leads to more than allowing experience to slip through our fingers. It leads to an

attitude toward the elderly that writes them off as human beings. They become large, old dolls in the minds of the populace. Things you put on the shelf and visit on occasion much as a youngster does to toys they are outgrowing but can't entirely give up.

It's an outgrowth of this attitude that helps create the situation in Waterford and is helping create similar situations in the cities, towns and suburbs of our country. It's more important to keep up the property values in a subdivision than give six elderly women a chance to live in dignity. But a deed restriction in their subdivision limited residency to members of the same family.

But what do you do if you don't have a family and can't afford to live alone?

Loretta Conway, senior adult coordinator for Farmington Hills, posed this question. Her answer was that caring and sharing made a family. But that, she admitted was a moral definition and not a legal one.

All the feelings of discomfort relating to having

the elderly live with the rest of us are unfounded, she insists.

"WITH THE RETARDED (people have learned that) all the dire warnings aren't true," she said.

Those dire warnings about the retarded did include, in the words of a retarded man, "People were afraid we were going to rape their children."

Those lessons are incorporated into law now. At the same time the Michigan Supreme Court upheld the Waterford Township decision to evict the elderly women, it also guarded the rights of the retarded to live in a single family home in a residential section, even though they weren't related. The state's constitution says that programs for the mentally retarded should be supported, so the Supreme Court supported them.

The state constitution doesn't mention the same about the elderly and programs for older citizens.

It should. Property values shouldn't be placed over human rights. Revolutions have been built on that premise.

Maybe in the case of the retarded, we like the way we feel when we believe we're helping those less fortunate. It gives us a liberal righteous thrill.

But when it comes to the elderly, the situation is different. We no longer deal with the feeling that it can't happen to us.

WITH ANY LUCK, we are the elderly of the future. And we don't like what we see. We don't like the world we've built for the elderly, the once nimble people who are slowing down. We don't want to admit to ourselves that it will happen to us.

Ms. Conway tells a story about a young girl whose grandmother was living with her family. While the rest of the family ate off china plates, Granny ate from a wooden bowl.

One day, while washing dishes, the little girl asked her mother why Granny used a wooden bowl.

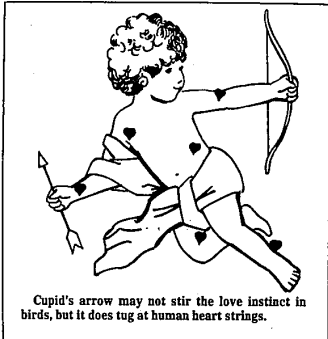
"Because," mother patiently explained, "Granny can't hold things as well as she should and if she drops a wooden bowl, there's no damage done."

The little girl proceeded to spend a long time polishing and shining the wooden bowl.

"My, you're spending a lot of time on that," her mother observed.

"Yes," said the little girl, "I figure that we might have to use it for you someday."

Hearts n' flowers please



Cupid's arrow may not stir the love instinct in birds, but it does tug at human heart strings.

Valentine skeptics are folks like my husband Jack who think the observance was created just to sell candy, perfume and flowers. If you're a valentine skeptic, then please take note.

More than 14 centuries ago, the Romans had this love festival they called the Feast of Lupercal. It was dedicated to Juno, the goddess of love and Luperus, the pastoral god.

Though? the church considered the practice pagan, it brought untold joy and merriment to the people. It was always held in February and it was then that Roman maidens placed their names in an urn in a public square for a young man to select his love mate for the coming year.

If that's not enough, oracles state that on Feb. 14, the birds of Italy mated.

During the rule of the Roman Emperor Claudius II, a young priest named Valentine was imprisoned for befriending the Christians.

Shirlee's sallies

by Shirlee Iden



Valentine was sentenced to death and thrown into the slammer. There he met and fell in love with the blind daughter of the jailer. The priest's ardent faith restored her sight.

The story goes on that before Valentine was executed, he sent his lady a message and signed it "from your Valentine."

Historians, in addition, tell us that Charles, Duke of Orleans, sent the first known Valentine in 1415 when he was imprisoned in the Tower of London.

CHARLIE sent the love note to his wife.

Now there are many tales told about the origins of Valentine's Day. And who knows if they are fact or fable?

True or not, I'm usually tuned into history and I'm no valentine skeptic. What better fun than to browse in the card department of your local drug

emporium or stationery shop.

Who hasn't found the perfect sympathy note that says something so well you can't quite put into words yourself. And oftentimes a birthday card or one just for friendship goes right to the heart of the matter.

With today's Valentines, you can tell it all to whomever you care to tell it to. You can say it comically, sweetly, sarcastically or straight. Valentines can mean sticky, chocolate fingers, a juicy kiss or a hand-scrawled work of art done under the watchful eye of the kindergarten teacher.

I'm not sure if the birds of Italy still mate on Feb. 14 or if they ever did. To me, Valentine's Day means spring's not far off and there are a lot of people out there I'd like to remind of my affection.

I won't count calories, and I just love fresh posies. For my money, hearts and flowers do please.

The Flip Side

by craig piechura



What's right about USA?

A couple of irate Republicans called last week, hopping mad about the treatment they received in my column about their choice of Detroit as the 1980 convention site.

I think one guy thought the headline, "Republicans got funky" was vaguely filthy. Far from it. "Funky," as in "Funky Broadway," merely means earthy. And if Detroit is anything, it is earthy. I just happen to prefer "funky" to "earthy."

But hell hath no fury like an angry Ronald Reagan supporter.

So, in an effort to set things right, to prove that this column isn't written by some wild-eyed hippie, some throwback to the Summer of Love, let me talk today about "What's Right With America."

The \$2 bill.

Notice I didn't praise the American dollar in general. Just the deuce. We're dealing with specifics here, my friend.

The \$2 bill was re-introduced in this country in 1976 after a 10-year hiatus. Fans of the \$2 bill had to go to Canada during that time to get a deuce. And who can take pink-colored currency seriously?

The Federal Bureau of Printing and Engraving brought back the \$2 bill with much fanfare; long lines formed at banks. The feds announced at the time that the \$2 bill would replace half of the singles in circulation and save the government as much as \$7 million annually in printing costs.

DESPITE MY BEST efforts, I'm sorry to report that it isn't working out that way.

My teller tells me that I'm the only customer who makes a point of asking for the odd currency.

She handles the \$2 bills as if she is

touching radioactive or pornographic material. With a look of undisguised disgust, she carefully counts out 10 \$2 bills and quickly accepts my 20 in return.

Usually, she has to go to another teller's station to get enough twos to exchange for my 10. Apparently, banks ration these things out to employees to avoid starting a trend.

The teller will tell you that they don't keep many twos at each station because most customers complain if they get one back as change.

The common complaint of people is that they don't like twos because they're afraid they'll confuse the deuce with a single and end up spending twice as much for a cheeseburger.

Sorry, that argument doesn't hold water.

People who don't look at the face of bills are just as apt to give somebody a \$20 bill instead of a one.

Either people persist in superstitiously thinking that the \$2 bill is unlucky or else they are hoarding the \$2 bill as a novelty item, like many people still do with Kennedy half dollars. As collector's items, these items aren't worth saving. What sentimental value does a \$2 bill have?

PAY PEOPLE with \$2 bills and watch the reaction. The cash register doesn't have a slot for the bill so cashiers look at you like you're an alien.

Place a \$2 bet at the track and one and you're ostracized.

I owed a friend of mine \$2 the other week when he paid the court rental fee at the racquetball arena. The next week I paid the court fee and he owed me \$2. You guessed it. I got back the same bill. The guy was relieved to be

rid of it. He must've spent that whole week walking around with a bill he regarded as an economic albatross.

The news from James Conlon, former director of the U.S. money printing press, is that \$2 bills just aren't being embraced by the public. And as a result, a temporary halt has been placed on their printing.

"Unfortunately, they're not moving and there doesn't seem to be a concerted effort to get them moving," Conlon said in The New York Times.

According to the money makers, you're as apt to come across a \$100 bill as you do a two. (Maybe you are, not me).

Bureau statistics show that four percent of all bills circulating in the marketplace are \$2 bills and another four percent are \$100 bills.

I'm doing my part for the federal government. But one man can't do it alone.

Help me out. Demand the deuce. Familiarize your fellow citizens with the strange currency by telling the following joke that requires a \$2 bill as a prop.

Tell a friend to roll a \$2 bill into a tube, making sure that he rolls the bill face up. Tell him to put the tube up to a light and he should see Thomas Jefferson smiling.

Invariably, the person will complain that he doesn't see Thomas Jefferson smiling.

"Oh, he must've got a ride," you answer, chuckling. He's bound to repeat this clever ruse using a \$2 bill, thus increasing the bill's circulation.

Face the music, America. The dollar bill is dead. Nothing is cheaper than \$1.00 in this country anymore.

Thank you for letting me put in my two cents.

from our readers

Resident seeks the rural life

Editor:

With much lamentation on Jan. 8, I found myself a witness to another capitulation by the Farmington Hills City Council (with the dissent of only one member, Joe Alkateeb) to the god of progress.

The council voted to approve a consent judgment brought by Ben Marks, which is tantamount to rezoning of the property at the northwest corner of Orchard Lake Road and Eleven Mile.

Idential when acquired by Mr. Marks, it was undoubtedly purchased with one thought in mind—to obtain zoning change for the express purpose of erecting a commercial building.

One has but to drive along any of the major roads that traverse Farmington Hills, and he will become aware of the myriad offerings of land for commercial purposes and the signs offering office space for lease or rent.

Is any more really needed at this time?

We have lived in Farmington Hills (and Farmington Township) since the middle fifties and have been painfully aware of the march of progress, as more and more people have discovered this area.

Now it isn't our intention to deny others what we, ourselves, have enjoyed. But we feel the real charm and character that drew us and many others to this community is the essentially rural flavor that most home and land owners

recognized and desired when they invested their time, effort and hard-earned capital.

We realize that urbanization and commercial development run hand in hand and aren't naive enough to believe that change won't occur. However, the Pasadena Park Subdivision, of which the land in question is a portion, was established in the middle twenties as one of the first subdivisions in the Farmington area.

Indeed, the adjacent lands where Mr. Power and other pioneers first settled, constitute the very cradle of Farmington history.

Yes, this is still a free country, and Mr. Marks has been granted approval

to build his office building against the wishes of the majority of homeowners in the area.

The city council says it knows best, and perhaps they are right. However, with such encroachment we give up something quite intangible—the assets we value are all around us.

The decision to bequeath to our posterity either land with homes and greenery, or paved lots and buildings that line our roads and byways, is irreversible and the consequence of our decisions will form our community of tomorrow. What kind of Farmington Hills do we want?

RICHARD STEIGER,
Farmington Hills

Couple supports Sorrows' group

Editor:

After reading both the low-income housing article by Steve Barnaby in the Farmington Observer and the entire statement, "Right To a Decent Home" made by the Christian Service Commission of Our Lady of Sorrows Church, we would like to express our support to Commission members for their courage in speaking out on behalf of those in need of middle and low cost housing.

As members of this "community family" for over 20 years, we have

seen much growth and many changes. We have also come to know many caring and generous people.

If our residents now refuse to accept anyone who happens to be different, aging, poor or young, we'll surely become a lonely, fearful and alienated group of people.

We encourage residents to read the Commission statement, to discuss the issue with others and to look for the best way of responding to the housing needs of our area.

ODETTE and JACK HENIGE,
Farmington Hills

A Division of
Suburban Communications Corporation

Philip H. Power
Chairman of the Board
(for name of associate)

Richard D. Agin
President
Chief Executive Officer

Farmington Observer

"Successor of the Farmington Enterprise"

Steve Barnaby
Editor

22170 West Nine Mile
Southwest MI 4807
(313) 352-5400

John Reddy, General Mgr.

Thomas A. Riordan, Executive Editor

George J. Hagan, Advertising Director, Fred J. Wright, Circulation Director