

Monday's Commentary

DIA needs a new stairway like a hole in its court

When the powers that be at the Detroit Institute of Arts decided to deal with traffic problems in the building on Kirby and Woodward, they didn't reckon with Richard Axson.

Axson, a university of Michigan — Dearborn professor of art history, was alarmed by the art institute's plans to construct a hectic-infested staircase in the middle of the Diego Rivera Court.

The court showcases Rivera's monumental mural celebrating the worker.

Rivera was an official card-carrying member of the Communist Party until they decided he wasn't toeing the orthodox line. Others felt Rivera toed the Communist line too tightly and, in at least one case, his murals were white-washed over during the anti-Commie paranoia.

But in Detroit, Rivera's factory filled with hero-looking workers operating great machines was looked upon as a city-wide treasure.

"It's one of the great mural cycles of the 20th century," says Axson who uses it as one of the cornerstones for a class in Detroit's art heritage.

The mural surrounds what is basically dead space in the court.

There's not much on the floor. It's the walls visitors should look at.

The trouble arises out of the fact that there are

more and more visitors gazing at the institute's splendidly covered walls than was anticipated when the building was constructed in 1927.

A TRAFFIC JAM has arisen in the cultured corridors.

Searching for an answer to this problem, the museum's directors have developed the idea of placing a staircase right smack in the middle of the Rivera Court's empty space.

On the surface, it makes sense. Even Axson, who doesn't want the staircase, admits that it's "a brilliant solution" to the museum's human traffic problems. The staircase would connect the four sections of the museum into a cohesive unit.

But what Axson and his supporters object to is the small fact that the best spot to view the Rivera work is smack dab in the middle of the court — right where the staircase would make its debut.

In addition to their fear that the stairway would lessen the viewer's enjoyment of the mural, Axson believes that construction in the court would damage the mural.

Institute Director Frederick Cummings contends that the staircase won't disturb the murals at all.

Nonetheless controversy has managed to surge and swell to an even greater degree than the pa-

Tinkering Around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

trons who are presumably stuffing the corridors of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

FRANK Joyce, a radio newscaster for WABX-FM, has satirized the hole in the floor of the court by predicting a future patron will step back to get a better look at the picture and fall down the stairs into the lower level.

Newspaper cartoonists for the Detroit News have depicted the discovery of a Rivera's drawing for the new stairwell. It shows a portrait of Rivera wearing a "Capitalism Rots" t-shirt and holding a sign that says "Watch out for the hole."

Even the Oakland County Arts Commission has condemned the staircase plan.

Local critics aren't the only ones who believe there must be a better way. Art historians from Vassar, Columbia, and Yale support Axson's movement.

And local private critics who want to join their voices to the stairway opposition can send in those cards and letters to "Save the Rivera Murals," P.O.

Box 15300, Detroit, 48215.

The letters and cards will make an appearance at the next meeting of the Detroit Arts Commission scheduled for January.

For those who prefer the independent approach, the man to write is Institute Director Frederick Cummings. The museum has been sending out acknowledgements and glossies of the proposed staircase to those who have written their concerns.

Axson suggests that instead of constructing a "second rate staircase" in the court, the museum could look at the plans proposed by the building's architect who provided for future traffic problems.

THERE ARE five staircases in the general area of the court which could be expanded and emphasized to accommodate patrons and call attention to the museum's newly important lower level.

And those five existing staircases would allow Rivera fans to walk through that beautiful wrought iron doorway into the court, march right to the center of the floor without fear, and lose themselves in the artist's reverence for his subjects.

Shirlee's sallies

by Shirlee Iden



Who'll plant the roses?

It's a tough scene in a year dedicated to children; but at least four sets of children have suffered an incalculable loss.

First are the youngsters at Simms Elementary School in Southfield who have lost their teacher, Gloria Davidson.

Then those who had the gift of her teaching and friendship in the past. Third, there are those untold students who will be deprived of exposure to one of the finest teachers and persons one could ever want to know.

And most of all, there are her own three children: Karen, Alan and Lori.

Gloria M. Davidson died last Sunday morning before the day dawned. Her illness had been brief, just a few short weeks. But her suffering was great.

Ask anyone who knew her and they will assure you her most painful suffering was the knowledge that she was leaving her children.

Karen and Alan are almost grown, but Lori is still young.

"I just need five more years with Lori," she said to her husband, Kenny, during the nine weeks of her illness. And unspoken was the thought, "let me see Alan finish school and allow me to walk down the aisle with Karen and be a grandmother."

Once, a friend said to me upon the death of her mother: "When your mother dies, then you have to be completely grown up, your childhood is over."

But surely, it's too soon for Lori.

A few weeks ago, we helped out Lori's 13th birthday cake. Our little friend and neighbor became a teen. And she's a typical teen.

She's petite and pretty, does well in school, helps a lot at home and babysits

often. Typical of many young girls, she's a "borse person."

Now, I wonder, who will drive her the long miles to her pony?

GLORIA loved deeply. She loved Kenny, her children, her students and flowers. And Gloria loved people.

What many don't know is that this loving woman came from a deprived background. Raised without a father, she lost her natural mother while a little child.

But Gloria gained an adoptive mother and sister when she was still a girl and was especially beloved of an aunt who stayed close always. They gave her the nurturing that made her a loving person, able to give of herself, to share.

Now she is gone at age 49. Her mother and aunt, both well up in years, must reconcile themselves to her passing.

AND SO must her friends.

But it's difficult to erase a friendship of a dozen years. Each time I look out back of our yard to the Davidson's home, I know I shall think of Gloria.

We were oldtimers in the neighborhood when Kenny and Gloria built their home behind ours in Huntington Woods. They came when Lori was 18 months old.

Our good fence made us great neighbors. It was the fence that first bonded the relationship.

Their house was still being built when I asked Kenny one day: "Can we take the fence down next August for our son Bruce's Bar Mitzvah?"

Kenny looked a little confused, then smiled and said: "Sure."

It was almost as though we were all having the party when the time came. Not only did the fence go down but our circuiters invaded Gloria's kitchen when circuit breakers gave out in our house.

But Gloria was unflappable, always quietly accepting whatever emergencies arose. Gloria never complained over aggravation, or even pain and agony.

THE FENCE came down several times again: for Elaine's wedding, an open house, and my parent's golden wedding anniversary. And, of course, for Alan's Bar Mitzvah as well.

Under the tent that had sheltered our partying for my parent's half century of marriage, we celebrated the next night. A silver anniversary for Gloria and Kenny.

Their real celebration was a trip to Israel, something she had long wanted to do. She cherished the idea of going, the actual visitation and the fond memories of that trip.

But their 25th anniversary was their last one together.

Gloria didn't like winter, the cold, snow and ice. Roses, the flowers that she loved and nurtured so well, refused to grow in such weather. On Sunday morning, three or four hours after she passed away, it began to rain, then freeze and snow. It almost seemed as though winter had waited until she left to descend on us shivering, shaken souls.

So many will remember her. Her quiet ways, her loyal friendship, her integrity and the miracle of her unending love and compassion.

But I wonder. When winter's over, who will plant the roses?



by Jackie Klein

Beatitudes for parents

In the pell-mell rush of the holiday season, we often forget to take a breather and consider the many bounties for which we should be thankful.

Forgetting for a moment the commercialism which has unfortunately invaded Christmas and Hanukkah celebrations, this is a time to contemplate and concentrate on real values. Children and happy holidays are synonymous. But sometimes parenting can be a drag and we tend to accentuate the negatives.

Mothers and fathers can gain inspiration from Dinah Sharp, a learning disabilities consultant who has suffered from a reading disability since she was a small child. Her son also has this problem but both have overcome their handicaps to help others with the same affliction.

Ms. Sharp distributes a list of 20 beatitudes for parents which apply every day of the year. But in the season to be merry and thankful, they're especially appropriate. This remarkable woman would like to share the following with you:

• Blessed are the parents who know when to say "no" for they shall not learn first hand the progenitive powers of a pair of white mice.

• Blessed are they who teach their children the relationship between effort and earnings for they shall not have to support their grandchildren.

• Blessed are the parents who hunger and thirst after learning for their children shall do likewise.

• Blessed are they who do not attempt to tackle the new math for they shall not fail.

• Blessed are those who can see the world with the freshness and excitement of a small child for they always will be young at heart.

• Blessed are the parents who may be called "sloppy" and "old fashioned." They can rejoice and be assured that they are on the right track. For so have children persecuted parents for generations and their opinions will change by the time they're old enough to pay taxes.

• Blessed are they who teach their children to understand and love each other for they shall not get caught in the crossfire of a sibling war.

• Blessed are the parents who let their children do for themselves whatever they are capable of doing for they shall not be merely unpaid servants.

• Blessed are the parents of babies who can wake up joyful and clear of eye at 5:45 a.m. for they will have to get up at that hour anyway.

• Blessed are they who spend adequate time caring for their children during infancy and childhood for they shall be spared any teenage problem.

• Blessed are they who do not expect more of their children than is appropriate for the level of maturity for they shall not be disappointed.

• Blessed are the parents who do not get involved in their children's spats with their playmates for they shall not prolong such squabbles.

• Blessed are the parents who take their children with them often for they shall see the world with fresh eyes.

• Blessed are the father and mother who spend time together occasionally without their offspring for they shall not go stir-crazy.

• Blessed are they who listen to their children for they in turn will be heard.

• Blessed are the father and mother who have found successful creative outlets for their energies for they will not need their children as status symbols or as justifications.

• Blessed are the parents who do not pretend to be perfect for their children will not be disillusioned.

• Blessed are they who pay more attention to their own individual children and their specific needs and reactions than to abstract child care theories. For they shall not be confused with the swings of the pendulum.

• Blessed are they who enjoy their children for they have found a new dimension of love and a reward for all their efforts.

Meadow Brook Hall — a cultural masterpiece

When early Oakland University graduates get together, the talk usually gets around to "the party" in Meadow Brook Hall.

One tradition at the very untraditional Rochester-area campus during the 1960s was an annual graduation fling at the estate of Matilda Dodge Wilson, who gave Michigan State University the land that would become Oakland University.

OU students — most from middle-income families and many from the first generation to afford college — tried to be blasé about the lavish affair.

But they turned out in full force for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dance in a real ballroom and drink champagne punch.

"I could really get used to this life," observed more than one would-be executive as the night wore on and the massive Tudor-style mansion seemed more homelike.

Many students, though, left Meadow Brook Hall convinced that simpler is better.

"How could they raise children in a place like this?" they asked, chuckling at the thought of maids chasing toddlers through 100 rooms.

THAT LIVING HISTORY lesson is repeated every day in Meadow Brook Hall, now a conference and cultural center for Oakland University.

Some 75,000 people yearly visit the mansion to marvel at its elegant furnishings and art works,

gathered from all over the world.

Located on a farm bought by auto pioneer John Dodge in 1908, Meadow Brook Hall was built by his widow, Matilda, and her second husband, Alfred Wilson.

American architect William Kapp of Smith, Hinchman and Grylls was hired to adapt Elizabethan rooms to American specifications. It took three years to build the home. The Wilsons moved in just after the 1929 stock market crash.

Today, groups from all over the country come there to learn and plan — and, of course, to speculate a little on what was like to live in a house that cost \$3.5 million to build — in 1929, yet.

Sunday tours, stately dinners and the yearly Christmas walk attracting more than 16,000 visitors enable the public to glimpse long-lost grandeur.

WITH SO MUCH going on at Meadow Brook Hall — especially during this Golden Anniversary year — it's easy to forget that the 123½-acre estate might never have become the community resource it is.

Instead of a national and state historical landmark, it could easily have been subdivided. Like Rose Terrace in Grosse Pointe Farms and many other unique homes around the nation, Meadow Brook nearly met the wrecker's ball.

From the standpoint of estate taxes alone, it's easy to understand why mansions are an endangered species. In an inflationary time with rising energy costs hitting owners of ranch homes hard, the 100-room hall has an operating budget of \$400,000 a year.

The project receives no tax dollars or money from the Oakland University's general fund.

Only creative planning by OU staff members, the dedication of many volunteers and those in the community who meet there has kept Meadow Brook

Hall open.

Preservation of historic homes is becoming a priority around the nation. It is important to preserve craftsmanship as well as offer future generations a glimpse into history. Instead of a rich family's country hideaway, Meadow Brook Hall is a place for the public to meet, learn — and dream a little.

But it must not be taken for granted. Continued support is needed to keep this national landmark from meeting the fate of Rose Terrace.

— KATHY PARRISH

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