

Monday's Commentary

Unforgettable acts make Kaline less than great

I'm going to say this quickly, and then I'm going to dive for cover.

Al Kaline was not the greatest baseball player who ever lived.

I mention this because the totemization of Kaline, raging since his selection a couple of weeks ago for the Hall of Fame, may have left you thinking otherwise.

Kaline was a very classy fielder with the kind of throwing arm that made Tiger Stadium's right field take on Little League dimensions. And, as Roger Angell wrote in his baseball book "Five Seasons," Kaline had the eyes of a lynx.

But he was not a notably good hitter. He was possessed of what high school coaches usually call "a bad attitude," and he was stupid. Worse than all these things, he was a Republican, but we won't go into that now.

Let's take this point by point. Maybe, for instance, you think Al was not stupid. Maybe you think a guy who turns down a \$100,000 a year — worse, brags about it afterward — is smart. Some sportswriters seem to think this makes him heroic. I don't.

Then, too, when Carl Yastrzemski last year became the first American League player to ever ac-

cumulate both 3,000 career hits and 400 home runs, sportswriters came looking for Kaline's comments on his career totals — 3,007 hits, but only 399 homers.

Kaline told them he didn't know another home run would have put him in the record books. You don't have to be Einstein to add 399 plus one.

KALINE'S ATTITUDE problem cost the Tigers the 1967 American League pennant. Ticked off because he struck out, Kaline tossed his bat into a bat rack and broke a finger. Kids do this type of thing, and Jimmy Connors, but not professionals.

The broken finger kept Kaline out for 25 games. The Tigers missed the top spot by one game. You add up the numbers.

I saw Kaline break a collarbone catching a fly ball to right field. With what even to my Little League-level eyes looked like plenty of time to turn around and catch the ball safely, Kaline instead tried a crowd pleasing, hogdoggery, Jerry Morales-type of over-the-shoulder snare. It worked, but he tumbled.

Still in all, in a game that has managed to turn loose upon an unsuspecting Detroit public the likes



Mike Scanlon

of Jake Wood and Joe Sparma, I will somewhat grudgingly admit that Kaline probably deserves a place in Cooperstown. If only by comparison.

BUT THE REAL NEWS in the Hall voting was the elimination of Norm Cash from any future consideration for a plaque there. This is a mistake of tragic proportions.

Once upon a time, in the ninth inning of a game in which the Tigers were rapidly becoming victims of a Nolan Ryan no-hitter, Stormin' Norman Cash

strode purposefully to home plate carrying a table leg on his shoulder.

Ordinarily, you'd have to say it's impossible to dislike a guy like that, if for nothing else than for his resourcefulness. Where, for instance, did he find a table leg in a baseball dugout? This single act should have guaranteed him ballot placement in perpetuity.

But because an insufficient number of sports writers liked him enough to vote for him, Cash was forever eliminated from any possible inclusion in the Hall of Fame.

I have to confess that I never wanted to see Norm Cash in the Hall of Fame. But I wanted him on the ballot forever.

It's not so much that Cash really belongs in the same group as Cobb, Ruth or even Henie Manush — but the simple act of placing his name on the Hall ballot every year guaranteed he wouldn't be forgotten.

And Cash is a guy you don't want to forget. Kaline, on the other hand, is a guy you keep trying to, but can't.

I don't really care whether he turned down \$100,000 or not. But I'll never forgive him for 1967.



Jackie Klein

To a new year Hula style

Winter is gray bleakness, icy-fingered trees like iridescent confetti, snow-powdered lawns, an unpredictable ruffian engulfing the city, a brown syringa bush which has lost its golden bloom.

The New Year should come in April, gentle as a young girl, soft as the promise of spring, wearing a heady perfume, dressed in shades of green signaling rebirth. But the world outside is the colorless color of dirty brush drawings.

Usually on New Year's Eve, I reflect on the passing of time as the snow begins to fall like popcorn. But this year, I made a toast to the new decade 35,000 feet in the sky on a 747 jetting to Honolulu where it was only 6 p.m. It was midnight in Detroit and passengers ushered in the New Year with a rousing "Auld Lang Syne." Hawaiians say "Hauoli Mahiki Hou," which means "Happy New Year."

It seemed appropriate to say "Aloha" to the 1980s in the newest state, Hawaii, with its youth, variety and excitement. Nobody could sleep away because the natives celebrate by shooting firecrackers all night.

According to custom in Hawaii, evil spirits are banished by loud crackling fireworks and billowing clouds of smoke. You can spend the evening in Waikiki, but traffic is at a standstill and you're better off walking than driving.

HAWAIIAN ENTERTAINMENT is currently undergoing a renaissance. It's returning to the traditional forms and attitudes in the hula dance and song. Kakauna, Hawaii's last king, was a big promoter of this tradition. But I defy you to find "The Little Brown Girl in the Little Grass Skirt in the Little Grass Shack in Hawaii."

You'll find little girls in little sarongs and even little grass skirts, but the little grass shacks have been replaced by condominiums selling for as much as \$1 million. Property values in Hawaii are out of sight as is land in Oahu. The population is 250,000 on the island, which is only slightly larger than Southfield.

Oahu is a shore-to-shore shopping center where you can buy anything from the native black coral to tickets to the Don Ho show, to pineapples and plain or chocolate covered Macadamia nuts.

On a somber note, I will never forget our boat ride to the U.S.S. Arizona. The names of 1,102 men lost aboard the ship on Dec. 7, 1941, are inscribed within a memorial structure built over the sunken U.S.S. Arizona's hull in Pearl Harbor. The captain of our cruiser tossed flowers in the water near the site and we all stood for an awesome few moments.

If I were to go back to the land of the pineapples and coconuts, I'd skip Oahu and visit the outer islands, which are aptly described in songs as Hawaiian paradise.

WE STAYED in Maui, an island wrapped around a rugged black rock promontory jutting out into the blue Pacific with long stretches of white sand beaches. Maui, the valley isle, is for exploring. We visited the old whaling town of Lahaina, with charming shops, rustic pubs and faithful restorations. You can still see

The M-275 decision

The State Transportation Commission has opted for continuing with the M-275 freeway across western Oakland County. Because most opponents had only opposed a freeway without offering a realistic alternative, the state had to choose between M-275 and nothing. Had the opposition supported a parkway instead of blithely labeling it "M-275 Jr.," they might have had a chance.

humpback whales spouting offshore.

We took a ride on Maui's sugar cane train for a nostalgic look at old plantation days and toured beautiful mountain roads to Haleakala Crater with its one-of-a-kind, awesome grandeur. Through the glass bottom of a boat we saw a beautiful array of white coral and watched a skin diver who brought up fascinating sea creatures.

Our tour took us back to Oahu for the last two days, which turned out to be a disaster. We were scheduled to begin our 11-hour flight home at 6:50 p.m. Thursday. The day dawned dark and stormy during a season in which natives will tell you it seldom rains.

We were momentarily disappointed because we wanted to soak up the last drop of sun and preserve our tans to impress our friends at home.

I have spent many a vacation when it rained for six days and the sun shone brilliantly on the day we were to come back to a bleak Detroit winter. But in Hawaii the sun cooperated until the last day.

BEING SUNWORSHIPPERS and diehards, we kept looking for the clouds to part and open up a sliver of blue sky when the lights went out in our hotel room. The color TV konked out in the middle of open heart surgery on "General Hospital" and all was doom and gloom.

We found a candle in the closet and walked down 16 flights of stairs by flashlight. The lights went on just as we got to the restaurant in the lobby and had a two-hour lunch we didn't want because there was nothing better to do.

The lights went on and off again before we finally finished packing. But the elevators weren't operating and we didn't relish carrying 120 pounds of suitcases down 16 flights of stairs. Luckily, the power went on. We had to be downstairs early because our tour bus driver said it would take at least two hours to get to the airport because many roads were flooded. He wasn't kidding.

The rest of our departure was a nightmare. Because of the whiplashing storm, every plane was late and we waited eight hours in the airport with wall-to-wall bodies trying to catch some sleep. We were shuffled from one departure gate to the other before our jet finally arrived.

WE WERE a half-hour out of Honolulu when our captain gave us the happy news that the jet's third engine was malfunctioning and we'd have to go back. We waited another two hours before another plane was ready, were held up in Chicago and finally arrived home the next night instead of the next morning.

During the nightmare return to Honolulu with one engine incapacitated, I did a lot of thinking about the New Year. I thought about how youth is a memory — regret a single moment and another moment passes, with the moments away and another moment flees. Opportunity hastens by if you fail to clutch it.

Old paths that lure seem smoother in retrospect. But to avoid new footsteps is like tap dancing in your stocking feet with one hand clapping.

We click glasses with our friends and hope for a better year. We see nothing to measure our fate in the new year. Will a war be fought by super chemistry? Will the economists chart depression? Will our tanks run dry? Life is a game of chance. We might not like our hand, but we want to play the game.

We have watched our young hopes run high but we don't mourn our lost illusions. In that plane I drank a silent toast to 1980 whatever it brings. I took another sip because we lived through that scary flight and through 1979.

The Hawaiian storm washed away the shining white sands of Maui's beaches. The New Year's fireworks failed to stave off the evil spirits. But I'll still toast a hula New Year.

What's wrong with Grape

Most new grandparents get a Susie or a Seth. We got a grape.

Our brand new little granddaughter was born sometime on Jan. 10. She arrived two weeks early, mostly I guess, because she wanted to be born on Santa Shirley's birthday.

Like most expectant parents, Alex and Elaine had some proposed names all ready for their newborn.

If a boy, it was a Biblical name: Nadav; and if a girl, Enav, which means grape.

Naturally when we got our phone call that our little baby had been born in far off Ashkelon Hospital in Israel, we thought of her as Enav: "Grape."

It was kind of fun calling her "Grape." People look at you a little strangely when you tell them you have a grandson called Arik and now a granddaughter named Grape.

But the morning after her birth, at about 6 a.m. Detroit time, we heard the sharp ring of the telephone and "This is Tel Aviv, will you accept?"

We accepted the charges and it was the ecstatic new father.

Alex was thrilled to have a daughter, thrilled that Elaine had a relatively easy labor, and thrilled that mother and baby were doing just fine.

WHAT ALEX wasn't thrilled with was the name.

"Wait. We'll tell you when Elaine gets home from the hospital," Alex said. "We're not quite sure about the name."

Husband Jack and I felt as though



Shirley Iden

we had lost our grape before we really found her. And there we were in limbo.

After all, it isn't easy to become a grandparent when the principals in the drama are many thousands of miles away.

So we waited. The suspense lasted more than two days longer.

On Sunday afternoon, the phone rang again and our favorite refrain about accepting an Israeli call played once more.

This time it was Elaine. The new mother had waited until everyone was asleep and walked over to Alex's office where there is a telephone to make the call.

IT WAS PAST midnight in Yamit, Israel, seven hours earlier at our house. But hearing her voice finally made it seem like a holiday.

She began by telling us she was just fine.

"The baby's been sleeping very well," she said. "The second one's much easier than the first."

Elaine told us that 30-month-old Arik was more excited over her own

arrival home than about that of his new sister.

"But he moved a chair over to the crib and just stared at her for a while," she said.

And then came the bombshell. The baby's name is Maya.

M-A-Y-A is an acronym for the Yom Kippur War of 1973 in which Maya's father fought and was wounded.

Elaine admitted it was the name they had chosen if Arik had been a girl.

"Mom, did you like your birthday present?" she queried.

What could I say?

My precious granddaughter whom Jack and I shall meet for the first time in less than two weeks is the best birthday gift I could ever imagine — three kilos worth of baby to love (six pounds plus).

For ever and ever we shall share our birthday, two Capricorns separated by two generations.

And I wouldn't be surprised if a certain nickname sticks to her forever as well, at least for a few of us.

After all, what's sweeter than a grape?

Mike Brudenell writes

'On the Beach' remembered

Of all Hollywood doomsday movies produced, "On the Beach" (circa February 1959) still haunts this earthling the most.

And for more than 20 years, the film's desperate plea — "There's still time, brother" — has gnawed away at me.

I tried for a long time to shrug the movie off as just a cold war nightmare, but that gut-churning fear of complete annihilation has returned in the past few weeks.

"On the Beach," starring Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire and Anthony Perkins, was filmed in Melbourne, Australia, in black and white. I remember the Stanley Kramer production well, as I was an 11-year-old school boy in the seaport capital. Gregory Peck was already a legend, and Ava Gardner about the most beautiful woman I'd seen.

The plot was a relatively simple one,

although chilling. There had been a nuclear war. The world was devastated. Only Australia remained.

But that would change, too. Deadly radio-active particles (nuclear fallout) were being blown by shifting winds towards the country. Soon everyone would perish.

My parents allowed me to see "On the Beach" with them. I sniggered at the scenes featuring a taut, terrific Ms. Gardner wrestling with Mr. Peck on the sands of Portsea beach. I giggled at the familiar shots of downtown Melbourne. I didn't know then I was watching one of the most important films ever made, regardless of the standard of acting.

The film, I recall, was set in 1962. I counted off the next few years as if they were my last. As far as an Australian youngster was concerned, the world didn't have much time left — and the Cuban missile crisis nearly

proved me right.

After JFK won his chess match against the Russians, I felt relieved. I was starting high school and there were other things to do apart from waiting for the Big Bang.

But a few years later Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had me dreaming about mushroom-shaped clouds again.

However, when American, Australian, New Zealand and South Korean troops withdrew from South Vietnam, I figured the politicians were wising up. The birth of detente between East and West was a guarantee, I thought, that the world wouldn't end prematurely.

For a short time, I thought, "On the Beach" had taught the world the most valuable lesson in its history.

I should have known better. Obviously the only thing budding politicians around the world were watching in 1959 were Ava Gardner's breasts.

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