

## Monday's Commentary

## Willoughby Wink heads for campaign trail

"I'm going to be a public servant." Looking up, I saw none other than town curmudgeon Willoughby Wink standing at the counter.

"Sure, Willoughby, and I'm going to be president of the United States," I replied in something of an annoyed tone.

"Where were you last Wednesday when all the folks from around town came to the open house? Everybody was asking for you."

Willoughby snickered.

"Aw, I was at a special meeting of advisors determining if the climate was right for me to run for office."

The only thing I could figure about the climate was that the spring sunshine had burned out a portion of Willoughby's brain.

"Well, tell me, for what office are you going to run?"

"Haven't made up my mind, yet. But I've narrowed it down to either the city council or school board. After all Barnaby, you're always lecturing everybody on how important local participation is."

I must admit that it never occurred to me that

Willoughby would be the type to run for public office.

"You see, I don't want to become an official candidate yet or I wouldn't be able to appear on television unless all the other candidates appeared."

"Wait a second, Willoughby, that's for guys like Ronald Reagan and Jerry Brown. I'm sure you won't be asked to appear on Face the Nation."

"But their is always WORR out at Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College," he quickly retorted.

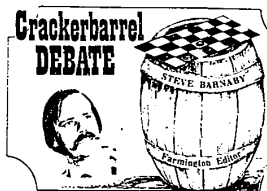
Having been bested for the moment, I went to another tact in hopes of persuading our friendly town gadfly to pursue another course of action.

"We'll, what are some of the issues you see being important to the community?" I queried.

Much to my astonishment, Willoughby held up a fluorescent light tube.

"First of all, fluorescent lighting in public buildings. Haven't you read that it's harmful to your health?" said Willoughby, showing some astonishment at the idea that I hadn't heard of this issue.

"Why do you think I wear these sunglasses on the



top of my head all the time? Every place I go there is fluorescent lights shining on the top of my head, penetrating all the way to my teeth. I've got good teeth and I'm going to keep them that way."

"Sure enough, Willoughby. What else?"

"Berns. I want every city to have a berm built around it so that whatever another city builds doesn't have an effect on property values. Something like the Wall of China," he said with much gusto.

"How high would these berms be?"

"High enough so that we wouldn't have to see any senior citizens lounging on their government-paid-for terraces."

Suddenly, I realized that Willoughby could gain some support.

This entire conversation reminds me that this, indeed, is the time of year for those of you thinking of running for office to give it serious consideration. Local participation is important. The more persons who participate, the better a local government tends to be.

Everybody does have an opinion on local issues. But your opinion holds a lot more weight the better informed you become.

Admittedly, Willoughby tends to get a little absurd. But in the real world, everybody's opinion matters.

So if you're thinking of running for local office, or know of someone who is, call your local city hall and find out the filing deadlines.

You too can help build for your community's future.



## "Around the edge

by Jackie Klein

## Brenda Starr she's not

When I was young and impressionable, Brenda Starr, fearless girl reporter, was my favorite comic strip character.

Brenda wore out more trench coats than Columbus as she dashed around the globe, getting involved in intrigue, crime and war on her glamorous beat. She never failed to make the front page with screaming headlines. Brenda never wrote chivalries but she single-handedly solved murders.

Ms. Starr had a definite influence on my life and my future career. What could be more exciting than dashing from adventure to adventure in search of a scoop? Let me tell you, I'll never find out.

Many readers think my job is fascinating and I admit it has its better moments. But covering city government can often be the pits.

Can you picture Brenda Starr sitting through a Southfield City Council meeting thinking about winning a Pulitzer prize for revealing bids on summer sports equipment for parks and recreation?

Try as I might, I can't think of a great angle to a story about paddle ball and badminton racquets, large and small whiffle balls, Frisbees and softball bases. But then I never was a sports enthusiast.

ANOTHER biggie is a request to buy various fertilizers for the two city golf courses. I bet you didn't know or care that the 1979 program is designed to produce comparable results with re-

duced overall costs.

The cost reduction, according to the agenda, is achieved by the use of fertilizers which have extended residual effects, enabling the chemical to stay alive for long periods of time, thereby cutting down on the quantity and number of applications required. Even Brenda Starr couldn't make headlines with this one.

Keep reading — it gets worse. The city wants to buy 20 sets of push bumpers, whatever they are, for police cars. Bids have been received for vacuum-type street sweepers and catch basin cleaners. How does that grab you as a human being?

If you're not impressed, maybe you'll be turned on by the receipt of bids for a tractor-loader backhoe. You can't accuse me of not trying. I've got a really big item coming up.

How about sewer television? That's what a lot of people think about the junk on the boob tube, but this is different. For some time, the city's water and sewer department has been having problems with sluggishness and back-ups along the sewer system.

I DIDN'T mean to upset you and I don't want you to lose any sleep over it. The city's going to take bids for a television examination of the pipeline at eight strategic sites so irregularities can be located. You'll be relieved to know the TV will pick up cracked, broken or mislabeled pipe and root growth.

I can't tell you if the sewer program

will be in living color or on prime time. But one comedian compared the TV examination to what a proctologist does.

Politics is another facet of my job which includes reporting what the public has a right to know. One problem is that politicians forget that journalists have a right to know. To be an accurate writer you have to understand double talk.

I wonder if Brenda Starr would have dug the following which appeared in a state legislative bulletin. I quote verbatim:

"Various ways to implement the Proposal E property tax rollback were discussed by the House Tax Committee this week.

"The governor's proposal provides that voter-approved charter or extraterritorial maximum tax limits would not be rolled back, and instead tax bases be rolled back on the previous year's property tax revenue increased by the previous year's average consumer price index after adjusting the tax base for new construction and improvements allowing the governing body to increase the levy next year after following a 'truth in taxation' procedure.

"However, next year's levy may also be subject to a rollback applied to the statutory, charter, allocated and extraterritorial minimum rates rather than to the actual tax levy rate."

Maybe if I had Brenda Starr's expertise and her trench coat, I'd be able to figure this out. I guess I better stick to whiffle balls and sewer TV.

## The Flip Side

by craig piechura



## He sheds collar for crime

A funny thing happened last week when a promotion copy of a new murder mystery, "The Rosary Murders," came into the office. Nobody walked off with the freebie. The cover repulsed everyone so much that they all set it back down.

Everyone, that is, except me. I took the book home. And I have to admit that it would be hard to find a gorier cover, even if you include True Detective.

The book jacket shows a rosary wrapped around the cold, dead fingers of a hand draped over the edge of an old-fashioned bathtub. The dead hand belongs to a dead woman — more specifically, a nun.

To make matters worse, the woman, like most people who take baths, apparently is naked. All we can see are her knees, and blood smeared over the side of the tub.

Flip to the flyleaf and you find that the author of the book, his first, is William X. Kienzle, ex-priest and ex-editor of the Michigan Catholic weekly newspaper. Why, "X" is even Kienzle's middle initial.

Contacted by phone at the University of Dallas, where he is working in the Center for Contemplative Studies, I asked Kienzle who was responsible for the gory cover on a book that may be judged harshly, despite the good writing between the covers.

"THE IDEA for the cover is mine," Kienzle said. "I visualized a couple of female knees sticking up over the tub and an arm dangling over the side. I thought it might be fetching."

However, the detective writer said, he thought the cover would be a drawing, not a photograph, and admits it may be a bit too graphic for some.

"Oh, my, I didn't expect that kind of reaction," Kienzle said when told of the general repulsion in the newsroom. "It didn't bother me that much."

"There's not even any knife marks on the woman, just a few drops of blood on the bathtub."

In years gone by, the Michigan Catholic, the publication Kienzle used to edit, would have given the book a "Condemned" rating on the basis of the bloody cover alone.

Which would have been too bad. Because once you get passed the gory photo you find a well-written thriller and more than a few laughs.

But best of all, after years of reading crime sagas set in Manhattan, L.A. or Chicago, we have a murder mystery taking place entirely in Detroit. It's one of four new crime novels that focus on Detroit, mentioning the city more prominently than usual — where only the hitman comes from Motown.

So, after landing the Republican convention and the Superbowl, it's nice to see Detroit's image hasn't improved too much.

REGIONAL CHAUVINISM gets a real shot in the arm in "The Rosary Murders." Since the whole story takes place in Detroit, it's up to the people of New York to puzzle over strange locales like Livonia and Grosse Pointe (like we have to do in novels that mention Hell's Kitchen and Little Italy).

First-year creative writing teachers tell their students to write what they know best, to draw from personal experience. Kienzle learned that lesson well.

The main character, who figures out the code to the killings, is a priest named Father Bob Koessler, editor of the "Detroit Catholic," who is somewhere in the middle when it comes to reform in the Catholic church.

In real life, the author is a little more liberal than his protagonist. But Kienzle says he purposely avoided muddying up the story with a subplot about a modern priest wrestling with his religion.

"In most novels that mention the priesthood today, the priests and nuns are having crises of conscience," Kienzle



WILLIAM X. KIENZLE

"didn't expect that kind of reaction"

said. "I tried to avoid that. Most of the people I knew as a priest, who were priests and nuns, were very secure people."

Kienzle said he has fond memories of his years in the priesthood and always intended to incorporate into a book some of the many stories he came across while wearing the clerical collar.

"I tried to weave some of those funny stories around the plot in 'The Rosary Murders,'" Kienzle said.

One of the characters chuckles over an older priest's embarrassing spoonerism uttered after English replaced Latin in the Catholic church liturgy. Instead of saying "Go, the Mass is ended," the befuddled priest said "Go, the ass is needed."

Fr. Koessler hears a young man's confession and tells him to say five Hail Marys to win the Lord's forgiveness. The young man answers "I don't know five Hail Marys." The cynical priest chuckles and tells him to say the one Hail Mary he knows five times.

I'm dying to give the plot away, but, at the risk of being murdered by mystery buffs, let it suffice to say that the best police and newspaper investigators are upstaged by the inquisitive Fr. Koessler. The plucky priest unravels the code of the killer who leaves a plain, black rosary on all 10 bodies.

I confess, I read the back of the book first.

The lifelong Detroit resident is doing all right with his first book. It's the main selection of the Mystery Guild Book Club, and alternate selections in the Literary Guild and Doubleday book clubs.

Paperback rights are almost assured and that's where the real money comes in. Kienzle said he's afraid to spend his advance, fearing that they'll take it away or ask him to buy up the remaining copies if the book is a stiff.

But that doesn't appear likely. There are even negotiations with Hollywood for sale of movie rights. What does that mean? "Lots," Kienzle said succinctly.

There's a sequel in the works, too, also based in Detroit. It'll be called "Murder Wears a Red Hat," the kind worn by a mossignor.

Kienzle and his wife, Javin, are headed back to the Motor City to do research for the book.



## Mélange

by Mary Gniwewek

## Pain of beauty exercise

Self-inflicted pain for the purpose of body beautification is a surefire sign of spring.

Caught up in the ancient rite of rebirth, a young person's fancy turns to thoughts of physical fitness in the hope that by June, we will all have bodies that will turn heads at the beach.

And so the ritual begins. Joggers, with beads of sweat at the temples, are chugging their way through subdivisions. Backpackers who will carry 30 pounds of gear, are planning trips through mountainous trails. Part-time fitness nuts, who like to shed a few pounds along with their winter clothing, are getting back into the swing of things.

Pain comes in many forms. Never quite understanding the philosophy behind running for pleasure, I have opted for ballet. Donning leotard, tights and slippers, I stand at a ballet barre in a variety of exerting positions at weekly two-hour sessions.

It is agony in slow motion. Poor, unworked muscles that relax behind a desk most days get proper attention. Sometimes the muscles scream in protest, but the mind tries to ignore them. Sometimes, the body wins.

Ballet is concentration. It is slow-moving and graceful. It is repeated exercise and practice. It is stretching muscles in the calves and behind the knees with leg propped on a barre above waist level.

Ballet is balancing the body in unnatural positions while trying to look sleek and graceful. It is arms wafting gracefully through the air and feet pointed in the proper positions. It is prouetting — turning the body around while standing on the tip of the toes.

When performed professionally, certainly not by this rank amateur, ballet is a beautiful, expressive dance. It fits in well with springtime.

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