

## editorial opinion

# Ice storm beat watching the television

Remember April 8 and 9. It'll win you a trivia session every time. Also remember it was 1979 when the big ice storm hit Farmington and Farmington Hills.

By this time you've got a 50-50 chance of having your power back on. If you're on the bad side of that equation, you're probably about ready to wander up to the local drugstore to buy some more batteries.

But let's face it, these catastrophes have a way of bringing out the best in folks. Sure it was inconvenient and even a bit frightening Sunday night as the tree limbs came crashing down and the electrical cables and wires crackled and popped.

At times it truly was a dangerous situation. But on the other side of the ledger is a good picture — folks helping out other folks.

The last time I remember such genuine friendliness was back in 1967 when the big winter storm hit

and virtually closed down the town for a week.

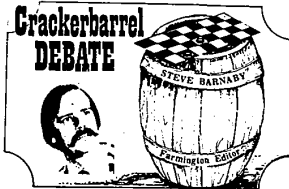
Granted, a lot of the spirit is brought about by a concern for one's own well-being — "I'd better be friendly because I might need some help."

But the real reason, I believe, is because weather catastrophes have a way of being the great equalizer — at least initially.

Mother Nature doesn't discriminate. She winds the winds or throws the snows wherever her little heart desires. Be you rich or poor, black or white, the weather will get you.

This friendly spirit ranges from stopping on the street to swap tales with persons to whom, under normal conditions, you wouldn't have said hello to usually parochial neighbors taking someone sickly to the hospital.

But this transcends individual efforts. Even the most cynical among us can't help but be proud of



the organized humanitarian effort which goes into effect when such an emergency occurs.

It wasn't very many hours after the first wires

had fallen that Red Cross volunteers were setting up cots and warming the soup over at O.E. Dunckel Junior High.

The DPW guys didn't have a quiet moment from the time the first tree crashed to the ground. Needless to say, their fellow workers on the police and fire departments were just as busy.

And complain as you may about the utilities, give a hand to the folks from Edison and Ma Bell for once. I don't care what anybody says, considering the extent of the wind damage, these workers are doing a fine, nearly impossible job.

The big wind storm of 1979 will be talked about for a long time to come. It would be nice if, for awhile, folks around town could remember the friendly and humanitarian spirit which exists during these times. What the heck, it beat watching television.

## Young's success quiets his critics

I've changed my mind about Coleman Young.

When he was elected mayor of Detroit, the city had a bad reputation. It was called the murder capital of the world and everything else. Suburbanites were afraid to go downtown at night, spurring quite a bit of economic development in the suburbs.

In the early stages of his administration, he dropped the "STRESS" police program which used plainclothes officers as decoys to capture muggers and robbers. This program was supposed to be the only thing holding the crime rate down from even greater heights. His decision was labelled "political" because most of the apprehended persons were black.

He was not a statesman when it came to his relationships with the suburbs.

He rarely had a good word to saying about anything north of Eight Mile or west of Telegraph, and he was particularly critical of construction of the Silverdome Stadium in Pontiac.

He surrounded himself with political cronies with questionable qualifications and paid them well. He was arrogant, foul-mouthed, but confident.

IF DETROIT had not turned around under Young's administration, we would have blamed him.

But Detroit has turned around and is on the upswing, and Young must get credit.



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

I have been involved with him on two occasions in the last month, and he has won my respect.

I spent some time with him in Honolulu when we were trying to bring the Super Bowl to metropolitan Detroit and had quite a bit of contact with his staff while we were trying to come up with a regional transportation plan for the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.

Young is still arrogant and foul-mouthed, but he'll charm the pants off you when he wants to. He is an extremely practical politician. He knows when to go forward and when to retreat in order to reach his goals. And he has a clear direction as to his goals.

He is a master intimidator. He can be a demagogue. He'll rant and rave and use street language, but a minute later he can smile and charm.

★ FEW YEARS ago, Detroit was Murder City. Now it is one of the 10 best convention cities in the U.S.

The Republican National Convention is coming to Detroit in 1980, and so will the Democratic National Convention if the mayor really wants it.

The biggest convention of them all, Super Bowl, is coming in 1982. After years of bad-mouthing the Silverdome, he was on the team to bring the game to the area when he saw the effect it would have on the economy of Detroit.

Young put himself on record that he wanted a massive subway system in Detroit when he didn't have a prayer of a chance. Yet when push came to shove, he promised sewer sewers and other things, and he got enough votes for enough subway to claim victory.

Being mayor of a large city is a thankless job. Seldom does a big city mayor get elected to a higher office, because the job eats him alive.

A politician is measured by results, and Coleman Young is wearing down his critics by his successes.

I didn't think I would ever say it, but I believe Coleman Young is very good for Detroit.



COLEMAN A. YOUNG  
A list of successes

## But how did it become his light rail subway?

I first heard about regional planning and mass transit in 1967. Irv Rubin, then head of TALUS (Transportation and Land Use Study), talked about them in the Farmington City Hall council chambers.

Nobody batted an eye.

Last week, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority board voted its preference for a rapid transit line on just one segment of what had been discussed in 1967. It was for a light rail line in the Woodward corridor — underground from downtown to Grand Boulevard, elevated to McNichols, at grade to Eight Mile.

All political hell broke loose in Oakland and Macomb counties.

This time, however, we weren't calling it TALUS's subway or SEMTA's subway or the regional subway. We — or at least the louts on the Detroit papers — were calling it Detroit's subway and Young's subway.

As my colleague Hank Hogan pointed out on this page last week, if Mayor Young is for something, it's fashionable out this way to be against it.

THAT'S IRONIC. Not until after Coleman A. Young became mayor of Detroit did he have any strong interest in public transportation.

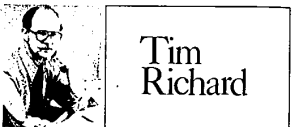
In the early 1970s, Young was just another state senator when the Michigan Legislature voted SEMTA its first funding. It was a half-cent out of a two-cents increase in the gasoline tax. It was a political donnybrook.

"Coleman could not even be bothered to spend a half-hour reading the bill," I was told by a senator who had risked his political career to finance public transportation with what used to be thought of as "road money."

Somewhere along the way, Coleman Young got religion. He is perceived by the public as not just a supporter of public transportation but as the promoter of "Young's subway."

Well, there are a lot of us out here who think rapid transit and a subway are a pretty terrific idea, even if Coleman Young agrees with us.

HOW DID THE IDEA of rapid transit get twisted into "Young's subway"?



In 1975, Young put together a "Move Detroit Forward" package. It consisted of pulling out all the most expensive federally-funded programs anyone could think of and asking Uncle Sugar in Washington to pay for them.

I saw an early, unpublished draft of Young's transit plan. It consisted of five stubs of rapid transit lines, all beginning in downtown Detroit and nothing penetrating beyond Grand Boulevard. It

was too preposterous for anyone to advocate publicly.

By the time it became public, "Move Detroit Forward" had two transit lines — one along Woodward to Eight Mile, one along Gratiot to McNichols.

I thought that one was almost as crazy. Instead of building one complete line in one of the major metropolitan corridors, Young was proposing two stubs, all in Detroit, only for Detroit.

That was when Young began alienating potential allies in the outlying communities. That was when he began forging an image, not as a champion of rapid transit but as a narrow-minded, racist mooch.

AT LAST WEEK'S SEMTA meeting, Oakland County's three board members — Hogan, Joe Bianco and R.J. Alexander — voted against the plan to put the transit line underground from downtown to

McNichols. Only Alexander supported even a partial subway plan, and that without enthusiasm.

The strange thing is that all three are from the Birmingham-Bloomfield area. Their community would be reached, in time, by that light rail line.

But the political hell was so hot that they dared not vote for any subway. Bianco had his hands full persuading the Oakland County Board of Commissioners not to withdraw from SEMTA.

If there is any political majority view in Oakland County, it seems to be that any light rail line should be built at grade. In other words, revive the old streetcar line that interrupted traffic flow and had to stop at red lights.

I don't see it. If a light rail line is worth building, we may as well do it right and put it underground to McNichols.

And if that puts me in Coleman Young's camp, well, I've bumped into worse people than him during my travails as a newsman.

## How to ask tough questions — and why

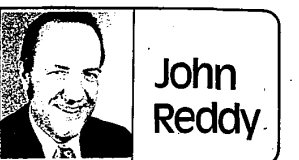
It has always been popular to urge slaying of messengers who bring bad news. It gets rid of the symptom, but not the problem.

In modern times, that irreverent attitude has been directed at the news media in general and reporters specifically. In fact, that was one of the reasons why, two decades ago, I thought of getting into the newspaper business.

On one hand, it seemed there would be a degree of job security because it seemed probable newspapers would be around awhile.

On the other hand, I had heard so many people talk critically of newspapers and reporters that I was sure someone willing to work hard conscientiously would have a chance to contribute to their improvement.

THEN I DISCOVERED one reason people didn't like reporters is that they didn't like their asking a lot of questions.



There is an inclination among young reporters to be sensitive to the feelings of their would-be news sources. It doesn't take long to get burned.

I remember thinking how prejudicially cruel my first boss was. He had this strong feeling that a woman who operated a small business on the ground floor of a residential building was involved in a devastating explosion and fire that leveled the structure and killed five persons asleep in upstairs apartments.

I couldn't understand his thinking because the woman was out of the country at the time of the disaster. When she returned to testify at an arson inquiry, she broke into tears, and I couldn't bring myself to take a picture of this tortured person grieving for the victims.

Of course, I was properly chastized when I returned to the office.

Several months later, police arrested a young man who admitted he had set the blaze and that he was in collusion with this seemingly put-upon woman.

Ultimately, she was imprisoned for her part in the tragedy, and I had experienced a long-to-be-remembered lesson: As a reporter, I could not permit myself to become emotionally involved with newsmakers or potential newsmakers.

REPORTERS HAVE an obligation to ask questions — to get the facts.

On another occasion, I interviewed the late Nelson Rockefeller during the time he was alleged to be angling for Republican presidential support. He had arrived with a battery of Eastern newspaper reporters who spent most of their time chatting as if they were in-laws.

Finally, incensed at repeated and variably phrased questions about his plans, Rockefeller revealed that. And the editorial page is the appropriate format to crystallize any opinion as to your truth suggested by the facts.

I queried the traveling reporters as to whether they thought I was out of line with my questions.

They said no. In fact, they said they not only appreciated it but had to rely on local reporters to ask pointed questions.

They felt because they were in his travelling party, there were implied constraints as to how far they could go in asking pointed questions.

OVER A PERIOD of time, I concluded a reporter could indeed do his job of asking the appropriately pointed questions. The key, of course, is that you don't have to be obnoxious in so doing.

Implied is the responsibility not to take remarks out of context. News sources will maintain a reporter's relationship if they believe their point of view is accurately printed.

That doesn't mean that point of view is necessarily the truth. Other news sources will have to help reveal that. And the editorial page is the appropriate format to crystallize any opinion as to your truth suggested by the facts.

Ultimately, it is the reader who benefits. Even the people who detest being interviewed rely on the same reporters to keep them informed about what's happening.

I would wager that even former President Richard Nixon and his jailed ex-colleagues still read newspapers.

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