



With 20,000 strangers, every kind word helps

"There I was, a traveler lost in a strange country, unable to regain my bearings because I could neither speak nor read German. I was on a train headed, I thought, to a small town

"But now the names of the towns we passed through didn't match those on my map. A sick feeling crept into the pit of my stomach. I had visions of ending up in Siberia.

"Clutching my rumpled map, I feverishly walked from car to car seeking someone who could speak English, or even a little French. After several blank stares, I came upon a Danish woman who figured out where I could change trains and get back on the right track.

"That was the last I saw of her, but I still feel that Denmark must be the friendliest country in the world."

— A true story told by a local woman.

A FEW KIND WORDS and some helpfulness go a long way when you're a stranger in a strange town. Any of us may have an opportunity to be helpful next week as 20,000 strangers — delegates, party staff and news people — pour in from all over the country as the Republican National Convention selects its presidential team. We'll all be speaking the same language, fortunately, but there still will be plenty of people trying to discover where to go and how to get there.

Yet, the people on the front lines in this exciting venture, will form their lasting impressions of metropolitan Detroit. If we are rude — or even indif-

ferent — they won't enjoy their stay here and avoid returning.

But if we go out of our ways to be helpful and express our pride in our home, they'll have a pleasant trip and will return. And we may make some valuable friends in the process.

WHY ARE WE so concerned about the impression they leave with?

The convention is expected to bring more than \$40 million in business to the metropolitan area. That figure is minuscule compared to the long-term effect a favorable impression will have on our tourist and convention business. With other industries in our state suffering, tourism is looking more and more critical to our survival.

The conventioners will be here on serious business, and an estimated 75 percent of their time will be spent within a mile or two of their hotels. Nevertheless, you may run into our guests during the day-time hours when sightseeing and shopping will be on their minds.

There will be no battle over the presidential nomination, so many of the 8,000 news persons will focus on what's happening in our town. The Detroit city workers' strike may hurt that impression.

But the people-to-people contact can overcome that and any other problems that may arise.

Like the Danish woman who treated one of us with simple kindness, our warmth and friendliness will make our guests understand how delighted and honored we feel to be hosting a national convention — and how proud we are of our town.

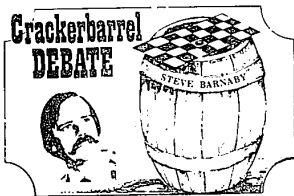
Like Stassen, teen drinking is back on ballot

I'll bet you thought the flap over the drinking age ended when it was officially declared only those 21 years or older were mature enough to immerse their brain tissues in alcohol.

Forget that notion. Like Napoleon, the drinking age debate has returned from exile once again to do battle.

We've got a new group, Citizens for a Fair Drinking Age (CFDA), which advocates lowering the drinking age to 19. The group is spearheading a drive to have the question put on the November ballot so the electorate may once again decide.

FOR SOME unexplainable reason, Michigan residents and politicians enjoy debating the drinking issue more than just about anything else. Tax reform, education, PBB and ERA pale in the eyes of Michigan voters when stacked next to this issue which comes back, year after year, like Stassen. Recall that in 1972 it was decided 18-year-olds



were mature enough to join us legally at the bar stool.

But the idea of our kid sister or brother joining us in the inner sanctum of the local pub was just too much for some folks to accept. So the age was

cranked up to 19 by the Michigan Legislature and, a few months later, to 21 by the voters.

The Michigan Sheriffs' Association has joined in this latest crusade to roll back the age. Its logic is that 19- and 20-year-olds are continuing to slosh down the brew anyway, and it's a pain to try to enforce an unenforceable law.

THE REASONS, pro and con, can be debated endlessly. In Michigan they have been, and probably will be for years to come—and therein lies a real problem.

Government at all levels has suffered from a credibility gap for years. This is true especially among younger persons just breaking in to the political system.

In many ways, government of, by and for the people has become a big joke.

The drinking age debate is a good example of why it has happened.

Michigan voters must be able to decide, once and

for all, at what age they want to permit persons to purchase alcohol. In truth, it matters little whether that age is 15 or 30. Consuming alcohol is an American way of life, whether we like it or not.

Teenagers are going to drink alcohol, just like their parents, legally or otherwise. But that is another debate grounded in this country's sociological fabric.

What must be preserved, in this case, is a faith that government can make a decision and stick with it for more than two years at a whack. At this point, Michigan youth only can look at "government by the people" and scoff at its uncertainty.

AS ONE STATE legislator put it, making it illegal for 19- and 20-year olds to drink in Michigan didn't suddenly create a class of abstainers.

It only created confusion in the minds of many as to what role government plays in our lives.

Water system edges toward regionalism

Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly, John Feikens is beginning to see the light.

Last week the chief U.S. District Court judge proposed that the suburbs be allowed at least to nominate members of the Detroit Water Board.

As presiding judge in the case of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency vs. Detroit, Feikens has moved over the years to force the city — whose system serves 100 communities with water and 70 with sewage treatment — to clean up its sewer plant.

At first it seemed to the judge to be a case of upgrading the equipment and operating things better. He was unable to put his finger on the real sore spot — that Detroit alone lacks the management and labor skills to set things right, and that a regional service requires a regional governing board and regional labor force.

Feikens' first step was to appoint Detroit Mayor Coleman Young as a special administrator with wide powers to straighten out the operation. It was, as many observers have wryly noted, like appointing the fox to guard the chicken coop.

THE DETROIT Water Board consists of seven members, all appointed by the mayor. Unlike members of your local planning commission, water board members lack a fixed, guaranteed term of office. They may be removed by the mayor at will.

In practice, Detroit mayors have appointed three suburbanites and four Detroiters. The violation this does to the notion of "one person, one vote" is too gross to dwell upon. This aggravated the situation in which the so-called suburban members weren't really suburbia's own but Young's hand-picked suburbanites.

Moreover, Detroit doesn't "own" the water-



sewerage system in the sense that it has invested taxpayers' money. The capital came from 1) state grants, 2) federal grants and 3) user charges.

With only one-third of the region's population, Detroit simply has no right to four-sevenths of the water board's seats, seven-sevenths of the appointment power and all the jobs.

SO FEIKENS proposes that under Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties each nominate three persons for water board posts. Mayor Young would then select one of the three nominees from each county.

Feikens' logic is that the mayor would retain actual appointment power, but the customer communities would be assured their own choices would serve.

That, said Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn, "could be tokenism."

It not only could be tokenism, it is tokenism. It's bad news.

The good news is that Feikens has become at least dimly aware of the fact that the water-sewer system needs massive structural reform. The bad news is that he apparently fails to realize how massive.

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments really should be taking a leadership role in seeking a regional structure for a regional agency. But SEMCOG is structurally inert.

So with Feikens slow on the draw and with SEMCOG inert, the only game in town is Kuhn's own petition drive. He and many suburban officials seek a 1982 referendum on their complex plan to regionalize the water board.

It sure beats waiting for the federal judiciary to get a grip on the problem.

Old-time editors' rules

One pleasure of spending more than a half-century putting one word after the other in the field of journalism is the opportunity to chuckle again at some of the rules laid down by the editors for whom he has toiled.

Over the years The Stroller has "toiled" under the watchful eye of a series of editors and owners who have laid down some very unusual rules which seem more unusual as time goes by.

For instance, there was a time when The Stroller was trying to fight off poverty as a member of the sports staff of the Detroit Free Press that the late E.D. Stair, the owner, took a hand in issuing strict orders. And they caused a laugh.

MR. STAIR, a kindly old gent who owned four of the legitimate theaters in downtown Detroit, fretted that sports events got so much publicity compared to the theaters. So he ordered that all stories on the sports pages include attendance figures for the day.

On one occasion, The Stroller forgot to mention the figure in his story of the Tigers. As soon as the paper was off the press, Mr. Stair told him he had disobeyed the rule and that amends had to be made. On the spot, Mr. Stair took pencil in hand and re-wrote the opening sentence to say:

"Only 14,000 fans saw the Tigers win another ball game."

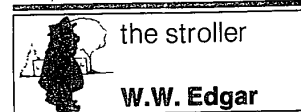
Mr. Stair leaned back in his chair and smiled, "Now you see what I mean."

His rule lasted only a week or two. It became a joke when every story started the same way.

A RULE laid down by Malcolm Bingay, long the editorial director of the Free Press, caused a bit of laughter:

"Henceforth, no story in this paper shall begin with the words 'The', 'A' or 'An'."

Try that one some time. It may not be as easy as you think.



The Stroller laughs when he looks back at Bingay's rule regarding expense accounts — and how Bingay himself was forced to break it.

Bingay decreed he would not approve an expense account calling for more than \$1 a day for gratuities. It seemed unjust, but he argued that \$1 a day was sufficient.

THEN CAME THE 1945 World Series in which the Tigers met the Cubs.

Bingay decided to make the trip to Chicago with the sports writers. He suggested we have a meeting at breakfast the next morning to lay out plans for the day.

Breakfast finished, he left a quarter on the table as a tip.

"You are going to have a helluva time staying within \$1 a day if you tip that much for breakfast," The Stroller pointed out.

"That's right," Bingay shot back with a chuckle. "Have you any idea how we can beat the rule? After all, it can not be broken."

No one spoke up. Finally Bingay said, "Let's all ride out to the ball park in one cab and then each charge cab fare. We can do the same this evening. Will four cab fares help each of you?"

They did. And it was the first time to The Stroller's knowledge that an editor showed how his own rule could be broken.

Those editors were colorful people.