

White Castle workers write from heart

Other journalists look to Le Monde and the New York Times for inspiration. I open up a copy of The Round Table, the quarterly publication of the White Castle hamburger system.

It's the house organ from the people who make the burger that gets no respect but keeps selling like hotcakes.

The paper is in its 55th year of publication, in an organization that began in 1921 in Wichita, Kan. Today there are 155 White Castles. That's a lot of burgers and buns under the bridge.

Unlike most food chain house organs, full of boring information about rising bulk prices for pickles, about 90 percent of this publication is written by restaurant employees. Employees write on topics like their job, their family, their hobbies and their personal philosophies of life.

The paper, with a circulation of 50,000, is available free to customers at the restaurants.

Round Table reporters are based in all the major cities in the chain — Detroit, Columbus, Cincinnati, New York, New Jersey, Chicago, etc. Their job is to transcribe handwritten correspondence from fellow employees into type-written print and send those stories to corporate headquarters in Columbus, Ohio.

Every edition contains priceless pearls of wisdom from employees. Gail Turley, editor of The Round Table, explains that all entries are voluntary, and that employees are free to right about nearly anything they wish.

THERE ARE testimonials to retired co-workers, expressions of faith and dissertations on the capitalist system that would give Milton Friedman a run for his money.

Turley even printed a long letter from a young woman who told how she ran away from home, hitchhiking around the country in a futile effort to find herself. In the frank letter she tells how she ended up being raped. Turley calls the woman's letter a "diamonds in your own backyard



Employees of White Castle write about everything from inner peace to outdoor recreation in their house organ, The Round Table. (Artwork by Newcomen Society)

syndrome" kind of story typical of White Castle correspondents.

"I thought a while about that one," said editor Turley. "I was worried about invasion of privacy. But she lived this, she chose to write about it and I respect her wishes." What topics are taboo?

"Partisan politics, denominational religion or knocking



Craig Plechura

the competition are about the only topics I'd delete or modify," Turley said.

From the spring-summer edition of The Round Table, here's Sue Medina's lesson to live by written in verse:

*'My name is Sue and I work in a Castle
Though, I have to admit, sometimes it's a hassle
Burgers and fries and hot apple pies
and the gazes of often-time lecherous eyes
But liking people as much as I do
I'm passing on this hint to you
Give them a smile when you send them on their way
And for that, both yours and theirs will be a better
day'*
— Sue Medina, Chicago White Castle No. 13

THE FRONT PAGE of the paper also contains a photo and caption about Andy and Cheryl Balafas — unnecessarily described as "dedicated White Castle fans" — celebrating their wedding reception in the dining area of Chicago's White Castle restaurant No. 38. Such intense corporate loyalty is common among White Castle devotees, Turley says.

"We've had wedding anniversary celebrations in our parking lots because that's where he popped the question. We've been host to birthday parties because kids were born on our lot. They're out of their head of course, but God bless 'em. We encourage it."

Turley figures the American public appreciates the

hamburger chain for its simplicity and its low prices. That's probably true. White competitors pretend they are providing a complete dining experience. White Castle knows it's still a hamburger stand.

As editor, Turley keeps tabs on White Castle trivia such as "Most Hamburgers Consumed by a Single Person at a Single Setting." The record is 60, Turley says, set by a recordholder who was "slightly inebriated."

Five men from Chicago, led by Gus Pano, set a record last November for visiting 25 White Castle restaurants and a vacant lot where a new Castle is planned in a 24-hour period.

When the tour was over, the men had eaten an average of 27 burgers apiece. Since these hamburgers have been described as "the gift that keeps on giving," such relentless dedication did not go unrewarded.

SOMEWHAT conspiratorially, Turley confessed he also keeps on file a list of the disgusting nicknames loyal customers call White Castle hamburgers.

Derogatory terms of endearment include "Ex-Lax on a bun," "sliders," "gutbombs," "burger of the bomb," (a reference to the Castles' 24-hour policy and night-time clientele), "maggot-burgers" (a reference to the reconstituted dehydrated onions found on White Castles), "holey hamburgers" (a reference to the five holes stamped in every patty to steam the bun and insure even cooking) and Turley's tame favorite, "Whitey One-Bites," (a reference to their size).

White Castle has put break on Turley's table for the past 30 years. Like all White Castle supervisory employees, he worked his way up the organization. In Turley's case, it was a rise from curbside in St. Louis to head of public relations in Columbus.

Does it hurt his feelings to hear his hamburgers maligned so?

"I cry all the way to the bank," Hurley says. "That person is simply displaying a little bit of the American character. We tend to make fun of things we hold most dear. In America we hold nothing sacred."

Not even hamburgers.

Who's being helped by court suppression order?

"It is the opinion of the court that suppression orders issued pursuant to the Michigan criminal sexual conduct statute violate the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States" — U.S. District Court Judge James Churchill.

The subject of closed versus open criminal hearings is complex, according to Oakland County Court Watchers who have been digging into the controversial issue for a year. It also bugs members of the press who never stop digging.

The case of WXYZ Inc. and Michigan Association of Broadcasters vs. 47th District Court Judge Michael Hand began when the judge issued a suppression order. He made a public announcement that it applied to news media as well as other human beings. It's a popular belief that there's a distinction between the two.

Churchill ruled the suppression unconstitutional. But, says Yvonne Atkinson, editor of "Watch Words," the Oakland County Court Watcher's publication, judges don't have to pay any attention to Churchill's decision if they don't want to.

Churchill in his ruling added that he is reluctant to interfere with the functions of a state court. But his opinion, according to Ms. Atkinson, points out the ineffectiveness of the criminal sexual conduct statute.

IF ITS purpose is to protect the rights of privacy of the accused and the alleged victim, the statute doesn't do much of a job, Churchill says. It doesn't restrict disclosure to the news media before the defendant's arrest. Court records and certain police records are open to the public until they're ordered suppressed.

Alert reporters can learn names and get some information about a case before a suppression request is made. It's not easy to keep a secret in a society as open as ours.

I wasn't an alert reporter in a recent criminal sexual conduct case. As a result, I have information. I was evicted from Southfield 46th District Judge Clarence Reid's court when the case was heard. But long before that, the case was suppressed without a written order, hearing or explanation. The defendant is a professional man with a good attorney.

Churchill concedes that the news media has traditionally exercised commendable restraint in protecting the identity of victims of sex crimes. The question, Ms. Atkinson asks, is who's being protected by suppression — the victim, the accused or both?

Oakland County prosecutors don't ask for suppression and routinely oppose it. Victims are usually their main witnesses. So if newspapers don't reveal the names of victims and prosecutors don't seek suppression for them, then the veil of secrecy is imposed for the benefit of the accused.

In a 1970 criminal case, a judge closed a preliminary hearing. The press appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and lost. The high court ruling says that if all participants in a pretrial agreement it should be closed to protect the rights of defendants, the press doesn't have the constitutional right to be there.

THE PROSECUTOR in the murder pretrial didn't object to the motion to close the courtroom and neither did a reporter who was there. But even if they had, the press and the public would probably be kicked out.

As Ms. Atkinson points out, Michigan's criminal sexual conduct statute is another bad game. It says the court shall suppress on request. The law doesn't say that a reason must be given, an objection may be raised, a hearing held on the suppression motion or



Jackie Atkinson

that the judge has any choice but to comply, according to Ms. Atkinson.

"Could anyone possibly think that under this law people in the courtroom could stand up and object to the closing and that a proper hearing on the suppression bid would be held," Ms. Atkinson questions. "One can only infer that the law's main concern is the privacy of the defendant."

What strikes this reporter as being unfair is that a chosen few defendants who happen to be professional men who can afford to retain an expensive attorney can have their reputations protected. Ob-

viously, the reputation of a poor Joe who's accused of rape isn't given the same consideration.

According to one member of the Supreme Court, exclusion is justified only as a protection of a defendant's right to a fair trial. If the constitutional right of the press and public to access is to have substance, they must be given an opportunity to be heard on the question of their exclusion.

IN ANOTHER case, the Michigan Supreme Court applied the law that sessions in every court in the state shall be open to the public. No reason was given by the defendant for closing the trial and the judge didn't ask for an explanation in that trial.

When courts leave the doors open for some judges to close a trial for "sufficient cause" the press will probably bring suit. Somewhere along the line, someone is going to have to decide what is "sufficient cause."

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that judges could close crucial pretrial hearings to protect a criminal defendant's right to a fair trial.

Americans marked an anniversary last week but no one celebrated.

Thirty-five years ago on Aug. 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on a populated area.

Hiroshima, Japan, a busy commercial city, was the target.

When the mushroom cloud had dissipated and the smoke and rubble were cleared, 90 percent of the city had been devastated and 130,000 people killed or injured.

The war in Europe had ended in June, but American forces were still locked in combat with those of Imperial Japan.

War-weary as Americans were after more than four years of combat, the shock wave from that first A bomb was keenly felt.

And then, three days later on Aug. 9, a second bomb destroyed one third of Nagasaki, a major Japanese port, killing or wounding 75,000 men, women and children.

It was the beginning of the atomic age and the end of the war. After the Nagasaki bomb, the Japanese rapidly conceded defeat, and unconditionally surrendered.

Such wholesale death and destruction was heretofore unknown on this planet. Even the terrifying rockets rained onto London by the Germans were nothing in comparison to the awesome new bomb.

ALTHOUGH VICTORY was sweet, there was a gnawing in the pit of many stomachs over what we had wrought by dropping those bombs.

I remember my father saying, and he says it yet, that we should have informed the Japanese of this ultimate weapon, dropped it in some uninhabited place or in the sea, and forced them to capitulate that way.

Who would have wanted to be President Harry Truman and make the decision that destroyed two cities and caused more than 200,000 casualties?

I remember wondering, if Franklin Roosevelt had lived, would he have done it?



Shirlee Iden

the damage wrought in August 1945 wasn't complete that day.

Suffering only began those two days for the people left alive in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

IN THE BEGINNING only America had the atom bomb, but that has long been changed. In today's atomic world, three major powers and some others are poised with nuclear weapons powerful enough to destroy all life on earth.

Possessing the ultimate weapon made war unthinkable. Or so we thought at first.

Elderly: enjoy or 'put out'

Americans are entering the 1980s with a disposition toward hard work, self-reliance and personal rewards, University of Michigan researchers report.

But this could mean problems in furthering policies to help the elderly, who tend to represent leisure, dependency and public assistance.

Thus, the U-M study on "American Values and the Elderly" recommends a "preventive" approach to problems throughout the life cycle rather than beginning at the age of 65, according to John E. Tropman, principal investigator and professor of social work.

Conducted at the Institute of Gerontology at U-M under a grant from the U.S. Administration on Aging, the study looked at the way public opinion has evolved over the past 40 years and what effect it has had on problems and policies related to the aged.

Tropman and his associates drew

data from the American National Election Studies which have been conducted every two years since 1952 by the U-M Institute for Social Research as well as the Gallup and Harris public opinion polls.

"There were no simple conclusions," Tropman notes. "Our findings suggest that American values often exist in pairs of opposing beliefs. These conflicts include family responsibility vs. individual fulfillment, private enterprise vs. public (government) assistance, struggle for rewards vs. entitlement to benefits."

While the values themselves seem abstract, they pose questions which are timely and familiar, Tropman says: Does the government owe everyone an adequate living? How much responsibility has the family in taking care of its older members? Should people be allowed to work as long as they want?

"The conflicting values of work vs. leisure illustrate the dilemma posed by

Across the nation, judges closed at least 155 court proceedings, according to Ms. Atkinson.

A July 1980 high court opinion is that the right to attend criminal trials is implicit in the guarantees of the First Amendment. Without this freedom which people have exercised for centuries, important freedom of speech and press guarantees could be removed.

As Ms. Atkinson sees it, it's hard for people to accept what they're prohibited from observing. A system of secrecy could never enhance respect for the law and confidence in the judicial process. We wonder if courts are closed for the right reasons and we're concerned about arbitrary closings without hearings.

The job of the press is to represent and report to the public. But the news media doesn't have the exclusive right to freedom.

The gray area of closed and open courts is a public issue as well as a press issue. And unjustified suppression can abuse the freedom we're all guaranteed to share.

Only six years after World War II ended in a mushroom cloud, Americans were fighting again with other United Nations forces in Korea. But though we fought the Koreans and in the end the Chinese, too, atomic weapons were reserved.

The protracted struggle in Vietnam is the ultimate example. So many deaths, so many maimed. Could we not have ended it all by dropping a few of those horrible bombs?

Though we used many cruel weapons and defoliants, devastating in ways we are now learning about, again we stayed our hands when it came to the bomb.

If Aug. 6, 1945, was the beginning of the atomic era, it was also the end of something. Before that day, Americans had always thought we were something special. We were the guys who would be for the underdog, who exported freedom, who stood for the right.

Before Hiroshima, we were always the guys in the white hats, the good guys, but ever since, well, you have to wonder.

public policy for the elderly," Tropman observes. "Americans place a tremendous emphasis on the work ethic. It defines social status and self esteem. Yet we also argue the importance of recreation and leisure."

"The elderly get a mixed message: They should relax and enjoy their 'golden years,' yet they should continue to contribute to society."

"One of the strongest viewpoints the elderly share is a growing distrust of the federal government," he goes on. "In 1964, 76 percent of the population felt the government could be trusted 'always' or 'most of the time.' In 1978, only 29 percent thought this. And older people have tended to be less trusting than the rest of the population."

"Paradoxically, the government has substantially increased its spending for the elderly in recent decades. It may be that the more the government does, the more people have to find fault with."