

# 'Dear Abby: What makes you tick?'

By SHERRY KAHAN  
Like Polonius in Shakespeare's "Hamlet," Abigail Van Buren gives advice. But while Polonius spoke only to Laertes, Dear Abby speaks to an estimated 55 million readers in her daily syndicated column.

And, she told the Livonia Town Hall, it is a work that never ceases to be rewarding.

The majority of her advice-receivers, she said in a talk at the Mai Kai Theater last week, are either teens wondering how to approach the boy or girl of their dreams, or married folks with a mate who "doesn't understand me."

But her favorites are the ones that are a bit different and give her a chance for a creative response. A woman 21 told her she went out to dinner with her boyfriend. They had three martinis before dinner, split a bottle of champagne during the meal and had four brandies afterward. "Did I do wrong?" she asked.

"Probably," responded Abby. Or the one from the woman who had been going out with a man every night for six years, but never heard a word about marriage. "Is he just going out for what he can get?" she queried.

Wrote Dear Abby: "I don't know. What is he getting?"

MS. VAN BUREN, who is 62, also enjoys what she calls the Freudian slips. "I've got a man who cheats so much, I'm not sure the baby I'm carrying is his," wrote one woman.

"Is it proper for the bride's mother to give her a shower?" asked another. "She could sure use one."

"I think I'm pregnant," read a third letter. "I don't know who the daddy is because my mother never let me go steady."

"Please send me the name of an illegitimate doctor," begged a writer, and another beseeched her to "send me information on the rhythm method because I'm learning to dance."

That might be a phony, she noted. In years of advice-giving, she learns to be wary of those. But she was inclined to take at face value the advice-seeker who wrote that "my husband burns the hair of his nose with a match, and he says I'm crazy because I voted for Goldwater."

The latter could be one of those letters the advice-giver labeled a phony, something about which she knows she must be wary.

SHE IS OFTEN asked what kind of people write for advice. "They are people smart enough to know they have a problem," she explained. "Many go through life with heartaches and backaches, not admitting they have a problem. But everyone has problems. It is good therapy to know someone is listening without moralizing or sitting in judgement."

In her audience, women agreed Abby's was an important service. Florence Orloff, a resident of Presbyterian Village in Redford Township, didn't think she'd write for advice now, "but I might if I were younger."

Mrs. Orloff has passed out her share of suggestions as a teacher and counselor at Cass High School and thinks Dear Abby's answers are "down to earth."

"If you read her column long enough any question you may have will be answered," commented Laura Baumhart of Livonia.

IN HER SPEECH at the theater, Ms. Van Buren touched on a few personal aspects of her life, particularly her relationship with her twin sister, Ann Landers, who also writes a nationally syndicated advice column. She once more denied the persistent rumor that she and her sister were feuding.

"We're good friends," she said. "We write to each other almost every day. She's got to be the funniest lady in the world. When we visit, we always sleep together and talk until dawn."

But the women at the Livonia Town Hall lecture clearly thought this personal tidbit was not enough. At the informal question period following the celebrity luncheon at the Mayflower Meeting House in Plymouth, it was clear they wanted more.

"Did you ever have a facelift?" was one question.

"No," was the answer. How had Dear Abby picked her outfit — a violet ultrasuede dress with matching wool poncho and purse?

"It is a color she believes is flattering and makes her look thin," she said. She was obviously pleased when several at the luncheon came to the speaker's table to tell her how well she looked.

"I'm quite vain," she confessed during the question-and-answer time. "I feel I want to keep up the equipment."

One questioner asked about a cooker from a company headed by Dear Abby's husband, Morton Phillips. The handles had come off.

"Send it back to the manufacturer," said the dispenser of consumer advice.

IN AN INTERVIEW, she spoke of swimming in her pool in Beverly Hills, Calif., from about 6-7 a.m. every day. "It is great exercise," she said. "I like to swim before the sun comes up. The sun is damaging to one's skin. The reason I look as young as I do is that I stayed out of the sun."

Ms. Van Buren is convinced the reason she and her sister are successful advice columnists is because of their stable family life.

"We were an upper middle class Jewish family with roots deep in Judaism," she said. "Before I was married, I took a course in Catholic instruction and learned a great deal about Catholicism. I attended a Methodist school."

Dear Abby's real name is Pauline Esther Friedman. Her nickname was Popo. Her twin sister's name was Esther Pauline Friedman — Effie.

"A sad thing in our lives is that our mother died at 57 and didn't live to see our success," she said. "I left Sioux City as a bride of 21. I wrote a letter to my mother and father every day of their lives as long as they lived."

"If you have parents, keep the letters coming. It means so much."

THE FUTURE FAMOUS writer of letters also wrote letters for people in hospitals when she worked as a Red Cross Grey Lady. She also volunteered for the March of Dimes, the Mental Health Association and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Her husband, she reported, is her "lover, best friend and severest critic."

"I show him everything I write," she added. "He looks like a European nobleman, with grey hair and a moustache. I'm getting lonesome thinking about him."

"It is not easy for him to be married to a celebrity. But he is very secure."

She said she became a columnist after moving to San Francisco and deciding the Chronicle needed one. The interviewer, she added, was "visibly overwhelmed" by her journalistic experience, and liked the way she answered advice letters.

She chose the name Abigail from a biblical incident in which the future King David told a woman named Abigail he was "blessed by thy advice."

Her second name is borrowed from the eighth president of the United States.

SHE WORKS at home, preferring the quiet there to the noise and fun at her office. She employs three male secretaries who open the mail and six secretaries, who respond to letters asking "should I shave my legs?"

"But I answer the heavy mail," she said. Many of her answers are never published, and are just between her and the writer.

Because advice seekers ask specific questions about where to go for help, files are kept of social services available in many of the cities where Dear Abby appears. She also has a personal file of experts on psychiatry, gynecology, dermatology and other subjects about which she is queried.

"I can't begin to tell you the caliber of these people who are not paid, but who give me advice for my readers, simply because they want to be helpful," she said.

At the luncheon she had a few moments to offer a personal opinion or two. She told Irene Cameron, whose husband serves on the Livonia school board, that schools should teach sex education. It should concern more than the mechanics of contraception, she insisted.

"Students should learn about responsibility, loving and caring," she said. "Teaching sex does not condone it, in her opinion. But every question deserves an answer, whatever it's about, and whatever the age of the questioner," she stated. "I think you'll find all children are interested in sex. But it may not mean that they're ready to practice it."

On another theme, she indicated that a woman might become more interesting if she went to work. But she cautioned against getting "all consumed" by work.

She concluded by advising her listeners. "The best idea a person can have is to feel she is never too old for improvement or to be a little better than yesterday."



Abigail Van Buren charmed Livonia Town Hall participants with anecdotes on the writing of an advice column. (Staff photos by Bill Bresler)

## Photo gallery tries new concept

By JACK ZUCKER

The Detroit Status Gallery, part of a large chain, has just opened in the Franklin Village historic district. It features a new, patented process whereby a slide can be transferred to an enlargement on canvas-like material. One room of the new gallery is filled with examples of these photos, some by a professional photographer.

Other rooms, however, feature art photographs. My 2-year-old traveled immediately to Ansel Adams' justly famous "Aspens, New Mexico, 1958." Its use of low contrast to emphasize texture, purity of line and elegance of form doesn't need further emphasis.

Local photographers are also represented. Pre-eminent among them is Ken Music, whose work has hung at the Detroit Institute of Arts. I was particularly attracted to "Adam and Eve," a large, color print of vegetable roots, a central orange taking the eye. Music's symbolism is both playful and erotic. His technical mastery is clear.

WALTER PINKUS OF Ann Arbor

contributes a nice shot of a dune and Bob Buchta some new realist prints. Although new realism is one of my favorite modes, I couldn't discover why Buchta shot his pictures with a soft-focus filter or soft-focus lens.

His prostitute standing against a brick wall, with a sign emphasizing the placement of her form, is a nice idea, but the outlines of the brick are soft. In photojournalism, this might be forgivable, but not in a studied composition. His portrait of an old man with a beard, on the other hand, is sharp and contrasty where softness might have been more pleasing.

Mike Drissman of Southfield is another new realist whose pictures tend toward softness.

Some abstracts were also interesting, such as the color photo of floating bubbles called "Gobular Reflections" by Laura Brody of Ann Arbor.

It is true, for I've not seen a photo gallery quite like this one before. It is located at 32800 Franklin Road, Franklin Village, just south of 14 Mile.

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