

Zany adventures lead to lively columns

By Susan Tauber
special writer

"I'll be the world's hottest six-week burnout. Nobody will give a darn what I think," Nickie McWhirter predicted when her boss suggested she write a column for the Detroit Free Press.

Four years and more than 800 columns later, Ms. McWhirter now knows she was wrong.

"I've had an awful lot of adventurous living crammed into not too many years," the writer told a large audience last week.

"Because of these experiences, my boss thought people might enjoy my 'eye and ear' on life."

From a stage decorated like a newspaper work room, Ms. McWhirter talked about some of those experiences.

"HAD the perfect marriage, the perfect house and three perfect children," said the mother of Suzanne, 26, and twin sons Chuck and Jim, who are 15 months younger.

I got a divorce. That was an adventure in itself. In 1981 I went to work for the Detroit Free Press. That was my vehicle to many zany adventures," she added.

As an investigative reporter, Ms. McWhirter became a student of the religion of scientology for six weeks. She "married" another reporter for a while in order to do a story on marriage

counselors. And she was the first woman to take a race-car driving class in Waterford, driving a Shelby Cobra borrowed from Ford Motor Co.

"I had the potentially fastest car of all the students. In the three student races I entered, I came in dead last," recalled Ms. McWhirter, a Peoria, Ill. native who grew up in Wyandotte.

NOW A COLUMNIST, she no longer takes assignments from editors.

"Being a columnist means having the freedom to write about what interests me. It's the most creative writing job at the newspapers," Ms. McWhirter said.

"Sometimes it's tough coming up with ideas for four columns a week, but I get my inspirations from books, magazines, newspapers, other people and from events in my own life."

The writer's column, which is printed in "The Way We Live" section of the Detroit Free Press, is syndicated twice a week in 80 Canadian and U.S. newspapers through the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain.

Before leaving the stage, Ms. McWhirter admitted she once suffered from the "working mother" complex. This ended as soon as she stayed home for a week to see if being home made any difference to her daughter, then 7.

"IT DIDN'T. She was too busy dashing out the door after school to play with her friends to notice I was home,"

Ms. McWhirter said. "I went back to work without any guilt and have been working ever since."

"Women who work at anything become role models for girls and male children. The more choices we can give them on what it is to become a woman, the better it is for them all," she added.

Although the columnist became a Detroit Free Press employee with no formal newspaper experience, she's always had an interest in writing.

"When I was a child, I was constantly changing the characters, plots and endings of children's stories," said Ms. McWhirter, who majored in English and literature at the University of Michigan.

FORTUNATELY FOR her fans, Ms. McWhirter has no immediate plans of forsaking her column. "Journalism is a calling, like medicine, except that doctors make more money," she quipped. "I'll write forever. Reporters are a strange community of human beings. I'm proud to be a part of them."

Ms. McWhirter plans to pursue other types of writing, such as composing a collection of essays for a book.

Answering questions, Ms. McWhirter talked about members of her family who she frequently includes in her columns.

The luncheon crowd learned that her ex-husband Ed McWhirter lives in Chicago now. Her mother, hospitalized recently, is recovering from her illness.



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Columnist McWhirter plans to continue her column while putting together a collection of essays for a book.

Concert, cabaret to insure that Franklin band plays on

By Carmine Brooks Tuskul
special writer

For 22 years the Franklin Village Band has been a symbol of community spirit in Franklin.

In straw hats, string ties and maroon blazers, the band's musicians have been seen and heard by millions at Tiger baseball games, the Michigan State Fair, the annual Thanksgiving Day parade and at Memorial Day services.

It played at Labor Day Round-up festivities at the end of summer and in schools, hospitals, senior citizens' homes and at dedication ceremonies. At the Henry Ford Museum, it was billed as the "famous" Franklin Village Band.

On Friday night at 8 p.m. in the Franklin school gymnasium the band will present a pop concert directed by Dr. Conrad Lam, its founder.

TICKETS are \$2.50 for the benefit performance, available at the door. Proceeds from the concert will be applied toward community costs to use

the Franklin School for the coming year. The public is invited.

The Village council and the Birmingham school board are presently working on a leasing agreement for the portion of the school building at Franklin and Romany Roads in the historic district.

The band's present 37 members are doctors, dentists, business executives, a company president, a teacher, an artist, a newspaperman and a student.

These are both men and women who generously have given their time and love of making music without asking for anything in return.

A Detroit daily once suggested that the band members "may be the highest paid bandmen in the country though they play for free."

Franklin Village Band concerts combine 18th, 19th, and 20th century classical music of great masters, light and heavy overtures, with marches and popular music.

The program tomorrow night will include Rodgers and Hammerstein selections, a Gershwin rhapsody, waltzes and marching music, and will feature

cornet, trumpet and trombone solos.

Following the concert, the program will change from concert to bunny hop, in which the audience can dance to the tunes of Bill Ellison's five-piece Village Aires combo.

The gym will have tables and chairs arranged cabaret style with snacks and refreshments available.

JOHN HARMS, a Franklin newspaper executive, will act as commentator.

Franklin's band from 1880 to 1895

was called the Franklin Cornet Band.

In 1959, the Franklin Village Band was reactivated by its present conductor, Dr. Conrad Lam of Farmington Hills.

Lam is a retired thoracic surgeon from Henry Ford Hospital, who as a young man in Texas sold musical instruments to help finance his way through Yale Medical School. His wife, Marian (who is not a librarian) is also a band member and has had professional symphony experience.

More than 150 area musicians have been band members during the last two

decades. They are replaced as they relocate, change jobs or lose interest.

Only Lam, Roy Williamson, formerly of the Ford Motor Co. purchasing department, and band manager Bill Ellison of Franklin remain from the 1959 group. Ellison has missed only three rehearsals and two concerts in that time.

HIGH SPOTS of the last two decades, Ellison said, came when drummer Gene Krupa sat in with them at a strawberry festival on the Frank-

lin Village green in 1965 and in 1978 when the band was chosen as the platform band during the International Kiwanis Convention in Miami Beach.

The band's library consists of more than 500 arrangements. The Franklin Village Band uses no amplification and performs mainly as a community service.

The continuing performances of the Franklin Village Band will assure that neither time nor people will forget there is an historic Franklin Village in Michigan.

Israel's robot revolution topic for Technion speaker

"The Robot Revolution and Israel" will be the topic of Dr. Yoram Koren at a 7:30 p.m. April 15 meeting of the American Technion Society, Detroit Chapter. The meeting is slated for the Ramsa Inn in Southfield.

D. Dan Kahn is chairman of the evening's program.

Koren was born in Israel and educated at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. He is currently Goebel Visiting Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Michigan. He is involved in research and instruc-

tion in manufacturing systems. Mechanical robots are devices that do a human's work. Computer controlled, they can load and unload machines and perform assembly, drilling, spray paintings and other actions. They are widely used by Japanese automotive industries.

Koren said they can also play an important part in Israel's future by increasing productivity as well as reducing costs. He also sees Israel as a site for manufacturing the robots. The public may attend the meeting, which is part of a series dealing with

industry, science and technology relating to Israel.

There is no charge. For information call 559-5190.

Celiac-Sprue event April 9

"Adjusting to the Gluten-Free Diet" will be the topic at a 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 9, meeting of the Celiac-Sprue Association. The meeting is scheduled for the Fisher Center in Providence Hospital, Southfield.

Another subject of discussion will be the forthcoming Midwestern Celiac-Sprue Association Convention planned for October in this area. The public may attend this meeting at no charge. For more information, call Roberta Grodin at 626-8577.

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