

Elderly suffer from nation's neglect

Daniels' den

by Emory Daniels

Every person born is destined to grow older. And today more persons are passing age 65 than in any previous decade.

In fact, because of higher quality healthcare, we can expect more persons to live for longer periods of time beyond age 65.

We also know that women live longer than men, and so there will be a greater proportion of widows over 65 than widowers.

Despite this knowledge, though, our nation and state are not doing enough to meet the needs of the elderly.

More than 40 years ago we came up with the Social Security system and then waited a few years to add a Medicare/Medicaid program. These programs give the elderly who are poor a crack at survival.

But beyond mere survival, we really haven't done enough to help our aged friends, relatives, neighbors, and fellow citizens who live in poverty for no other reason than they are old.

Oh, there are many, many programs and services which are aimed at meeting the needs of the middle class and lower-middle-class senior citizens. These services, for the most part, are aimed at senior citizens who own their own homes, have access to transportation, and have some mobility. But for the poor, we have not met our obligations very well.

I KNOW OF individual cases where a senior citizen living alone, with Social Security as a sole income, is being given food stamps of \$15 to \$20 a month.

Because they cannot live on \$20 a month for food, they eat oatmeal and bran cereal three times a day and end up in the hospital suffering from malnutrition.

If that sounds like an exaggeration, let's look at the record. And while we are at it, let's look at the record for what is happening to our middle class seniors as well as those relegated to live in poverty until death.

Focus:HOPE in Detroit reported last week that the elderly poor are growing in number — more than 125,000 in Wayne County alone. Of these, 50,000 old people receive \$1,600 a year, less than most of us spend on our cars, for food, housing, clothes and utilities.

One in every four seniors is anemic. Many with subclinical B-vitamin deficiency are misdiagnosed as being senile.

Focus:HOPE staffers conducted an investigation and found an "invisible" population of poor old persons who are proud, hungry and afraid. What they found was the classic cycle of poverty — low income, poor diet, poor health, and inadequate assistance programs all contributing to the problem.

Father William Cunningham, director of Focus:HOPE, notes that the "abandonment of our old people has become a major moral crisis. Many young people, overwhelmed with their own problems, don't even know that their parents and grandparents are starving and too proud to ask for help."

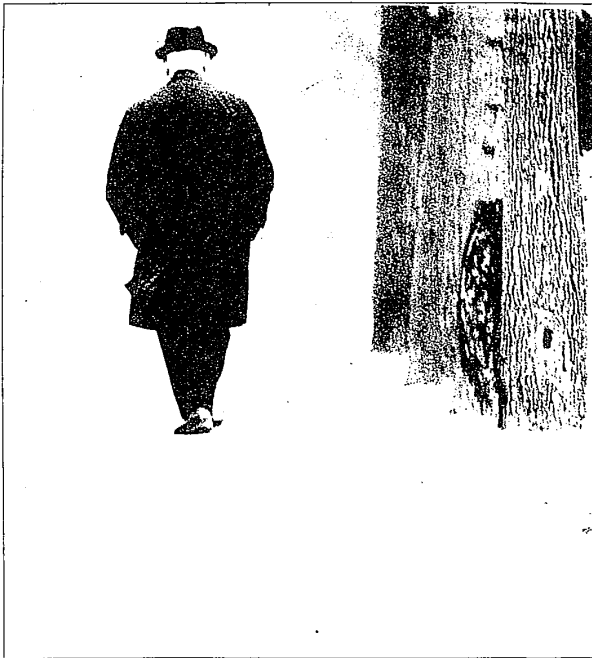
IF YOU THINK Father Cunningham and the Focus:HOPE staff are a bunch of do-gooders, then let's look elsewhere.

In 1980, one-seventh of those 65 and older in the U.S. lived below the poverty level, with most being widows. (In 1970 some 25 percent of our senior citizens were below the poverty level).

What we must not overlook, though, is that most of the aged poor did not become poor until they retired — a step which resulted in their income dropping by 50 to 66 percent.

What has been happening now for a number of years is that middle class working people retire and become poor. And it is much harder for them to lose their newfound poverty than it is for persons who have been poor all their life.

According to the American Association of Re-



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tired Persons (AARP), persons 65 and older must see physicians 50 percent more often than young persons, and the older group has health care and medical bills which are four times those of younger persons.

Although the elderly make up only 11 percent of the U.S. population they account for 29 percent of total personal health care expenditures (\$49 billion out of \$168 billion in 1980).

THE JOB SIDE of the picture for the aged is just as dismal.

At the beginning of the 20th century, two-thirds of the men over 65 years of age were still actively working while in 1979 this level had dropped to only one-fifth.

In 1900 only 8 percent of women over 65 were in the work force. By 1974 the level reached 10 percent but then dropped back to 8 percent in 1979. Most of the elderly who are actively employed are working on farms, are self-employed, or work at part-time jobs.

Widows outnumber widowers 5.5 to 1 in the 65-and-older class. Men, however, have a much greater problem adjusting to life without a spouse because they don't expect to live longer than their wives and are unprepared to cope.

What we must not overlook, though, is that most of all older women and 23 percent of all older men live alone or with non-relatives. The notion that most older persons live in nursing homes is false. Less than 5 percent of persons 65 and older are institutionalized.

About 86 percent of persons 65 and older still live in the same house they lived in before retiring. For those who do move, it is only a short distance — usually to a smaller house or to an apartment.

Only about 2.3 percent of our senior citizens move to different states, such as Florida or Arizona. For many, lack of money prohibits such retirement moves.

A couple of years ago we considered building senior citizen apartments with subsidized rent for low-income senior citizens. But some people became upset about the introduction of high-rises in the community, others feared property values would decline if too many old people moved in, and others feared the arrival of the poor.

Since that time, we have formed councils on aging and have done a lot to help senior citizens who still live in their own homes. We offer discounts on merchandise, free passes, and free enrichment classes for those aged who are mobile.

But many are still not being reached. The poor, whether young or old, tend to be invisible. Taught to be ashamed of poverty, they live a lonely existence and die alone — far too many times of malnutrition and starvation.

SOME PEOPLE get disturbed by senior citizens who take advantage of programs of assistance and get help when it's not really needed.

There may be a lot of that going on. But I get much more upset about my tax money not reaching the aged poor. The neglect of the aged poor is the real abuse in our whole system of social services, and until we find the invisible poor and help them survive, we should be very careful about cutting back programs for the sake of financial solvency.

Everybody seems to want the government to spend less money, but we morally cannot afford to close our eyes and allow older Americans to die from starvation. The right to life also belongs to the aged.



Lou Grant show is nothing new for this veteran

It's been said that when you start living in the past, it's a sign of old age.

Well, I guess I've reached that point. More and more I find myself reflecting back to the "good old days" of newspapering.

My thoughts travel back to the days I spent with the old Detroit Times and the crew I worked with.

Of course, these memories are brought to the front many times through my co-workers and friends, Eddie Edgar and Art Emanuele.

You see, several times a week the three of us gather in The Observer lunch room for morning coffee.

Eddie has been in the newspaper business more than 60 years and Art about 43. In fact, between the three of us, we have a total of 147 years in the business.

Eddie has a million stories, having covered every major sports event from the days of the famous Detroit Tiger Ty Cobb, to the speed boat king, Gar Wood, and the great boxing champion, Joe Louis, to name but a few.

Art has covered assignments around the world while in the army and for Wide World Photo and Associated Press before joining the Observer & Eccentric.

IN THOSE DAYS, newspaper people had a common bond. They gathered in certain pubs in downtown Detroit where they would drink and grab a bit to eat. Eddie, Art and I knew most of these newspaper characters or had heard of them.

We go back to the days when reporters from the three Detroit dailies and the wire services would gather at a favorite bar, enjoying each other's company, until a big story broke.

At that time, reporters and photographers were always on call. Switchboard operators kept the telephone numbers of the local bars handy in case a big story broke.

This is not to say all reporters and photographers were drunks. The bars were a gathering place and while some did keep the elbow bending, there were others who had just a beer or pop, played pool and swapped stories.

SOME OF THE events surrounding the editorial staff of the defunct Detroit Times sound more like a television show than fact.

If the Lou Grant television series re-enacted some of those happenings, no one would believe them.

There was the time in the Detroit police station when a big story broke. Reporters from the Times, News and Free Press raced for the phone booth in the hall.

Naturally there was a winner, but not for long. While the reporter was giving his story to a rewrite man, the other two picked up some old newspapers, put them by the phone booth door, put a match to the papers and smoked the reporter out.

On another occasion, gamblers had gotten a horse up the freight elevator to the Times newsroom. One reporter was on the phone when the horse came up behind him and gave him a nudge.

He told the citizen on the other end of the line: "Hold on. There's a horse behind me."

The citizen was certain the reporter had been drinking and demanded to talk to the city editor.

When the citizen complained to the city editor, that editor said, indeed, there was a horse interfering with the conversation. The caller angrily hung up with the remark: "You're all drunk!"

THE TIMES had a police reporter, Ray Girardin, who was like a character out of a novel. He knew every police official in the Midwest. He also knew a great many of the gangsters and hoods.

There were several occasions when police from Chicago or another city would call the Times and say, "Send Ray over here. We've got a guy locked up but he says he won't talk to anybody but him." And Ray went, many times returning with an exclusive story.

There was one photographer assigned to get a picture of Henry Ford in his home.

This was the days of the powder flash, used to light the area, similar to what the flash bulbs and strobe lights do today.

The photographer lined up Ford in front of the fireplace for the perfect picture. Problem was, he had put too much flash powder in the flash gun and when he fired it, there was such an explosion the logs in the fireplace were ignited. The logs rolled across the expensive carpeting, leaving a burnt trail. There were no injuries, just a fast-exiting photographer.

It was several days before that photographer dared to report back to the office.

THERE WAS another reporter who fancied himself as a musician. One morning he appeared in the city room and began playing a trombone. Jim Trainor, our Lou Grant-type city editor, said he was no music critic but advised the troubador to "take the rest of the day off."

This was a crazy business in the "good old days" as Art and Eddie will agree, but it was fun. We acquired a lot of good lifetime friends.

The newspaper business will always be fun and interesting, but, somehow, it will never be the same. At least that's the opinion of us "old timers."

Politicking at taxpayers' expense

Two Wayne County Charter Commission members have done what Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson, local, state and federal police authorities could not do.

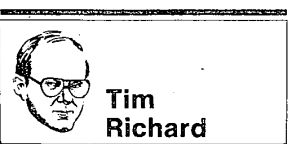
These two charter commissioners have also done what the Oakland County Child Killer Task Force, the Michigan State Police and the police of 10 cities could not do.

On official charter commission letterhead stationery and with charter commission postage, Charmie Currie of the 9th District (Detroit) and Roman Tafelski Jr., of the 21st District (Inkster) have put their sociological finger on the crux of the matter.

And with that solemn introduction, I give you the text of their official letter:

"AS WAYNE County Charter Commissioners, we feel and appreciate the responsibility and seriousness of the public mandate to create a charter that governs all the diverse and varied interests of all the people of Wayne County. The problems of Wayne County, ranging from budget deficits to shrinking tax and population base has created economic havoc and isolation among the people of Wayne County.

"The alienation and separation of out-county and city people compels us to recognize the importance of promoting unity. As Charter Commissioners of Wayne County, we know, unless all the people of the county are willing to join forces in the struggle to



Tim Richard

resolve our problems, there will be no solution.

"We recognize that alienation and division has affected not only the county but the entire nation. We particularly are concerned with that lack of togetherness that has allowed our children in Atlanta and Oakland County to be victimized and slaughtered by vicious killers who stalk and roam freely among the populations of those areas. We feel society has not made the total concerted and necessary efforts to identify and remove those elements from our communities.

"When Wayne County and America realize how important it is to set aside our differences and concentrate on our mutual needs and goals, we shall create an environment and a nation where all people are safe, not only children and our President. Let us work and pray for this mutual and realistic goal of peace and harmony for all."

PARDON US reporters for missing the big story. Here we thought the charter commission was working on ways to weaken the iron grip of the UAW on patronage, on ways to clip the arrogant wings of the sheriff, on a chain of command that could make the sprawling county government respond to the will of the people.

In all seriousness, we need to be realistic about what a reformed Wayne County government can and cannot do. Governmental reform will not catch child killers of any race.

Oakland County is far and away the most progressive county in Michigan. It was first to go into a county public works program, first to have a county executive and far ahead of Wayne County in organizing a community college. Its political splits are nowhere near as bad as Wayne's. But that didn't keep a child killer from striking repeatedly.

Atlanta, I don't know much about except that its public transit system is years ahead of ours, and it's a relative boom town compared to southeast Michigan. Yet that didn't keep a killer of young people from striking repeatedly.

I'm all for catching child killers. I endorse county reform. But the two issues are discrete. Charter commissioners Currie and Tafelski do little to solve the killings with their brand of pop sociology and public expense.