

Help save our hallowed institutions

The contest was a search for the young geezers of America. Sponsored by National Public Radio's news program "All Things Considered," the contest asked listeners to submit exasperating examples of changes in our workaday world that cause even our optimistic youth to grumble, gripe and yearn for the good ol' days. The good ol' days of five, 10, 15 years ago.

One listener lamented the fate of the paperback book. A copy of "The Catcher in the Rye" cost 75 cents in 1968 and now costs just under \$3. Mind you, young geezers aren't the same people who think Guy Lombardo led the last good music group. They might listen to the Rolling Stones loud but occasionally need some continuity in our constantly changing world.

We all know there never was a good day. Before biting into the apple, Adam and Eve undoubtedly realized that it sure didn't look as juicy as the Winesaps they used to sell at that other garden they meant to shop at before it closed down.

There are more reasons than mere nostalgia for the ranks of young geezers. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool nonconformist holds some traditions sacred and will mourn the passing of some familiar institutions. I, myself, am hung up on saving the penny and the proper Detroit Tiger theme song.

IN THE FIGHT to save the Tiger radio theme song, I found that I had an important ally.

About a month ago I was ready to scream for the return of the old Tiger theme song, the beloved and familiar "Ba dadda, da dum, dum, dadda da dum." The blasphemous tune title sounded more like "Ba dadda, da dum, dum, dadda da dum" than the year ago was a disco variation of the old chestnut, "Hold That Tiger."



Craig Piechura

And then, after nine straight Tiger victories, Frank Beckman, WJR sports director, abruptly yanked the disco theme and played the right one again.

The Tigers winning streak ended last same night, leading WJR disc jockey Warren Pierce to blame Beckman for the Bengals' loss. Infidel Pierce went so far as to call the beloved "Ba dadda, da dum, dum, dadda da dum" theme "waltz music." Beckman fired back a volley, calling Pierce "Captain Disco."

The exchange caused this young geezer to take telephone in hand and assure Beckman that true Tiger fans, like myself, were behind the move back to the "Ba dadda, da dum, dum, dadda da dum" theme. Later, on the airwaves, Beckman said he was deluged by calls from right-thinking persons such as myself supporting the young geezer stance.

Incidentally, neither Beckman nor any Tiger official could come up with the name of the beloved theme song, though it wrote it or whether it ever had any words.

The important thing is nearly everyone could hum the dumb thing.

AS FOR the lowly, Lincoln-head penny, a lot of you potential young geezers out there probably didn't even

know that it was threatened. That's how we lost the Les Crane show.

No less an influence on national custom, convention and political consequence than The New York Times is calling for the abolition of the one-cent piece on its editorial pages.

Before the copper-based penny converts to zinc, the Times says the whole coin should be scrapped and go the way of the half-pence.

The Times editorial said we can eliminate the penny in sales tax by rounding goods up or down to the nearest nickel. Guess which direction stores will round?

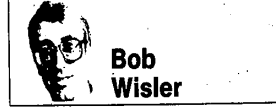
"What does the modern penny, worth a third of a 1967 cent symbolize to our children?" The Times wrote. "Thrill? No, quite the contrary. They see how their parents regard pennies: as a nuisance dropped nightly in the jar on the dresser because they aren't worth carrying around."

The editorial concluded by saying: "Its value and symbolism are debased, its appearance is threatened. Let's at least save its reputation."

We young geezers plan to save the penny's reputation before it ends up in the currency graveyard.

We will keep the penny alive by using them more. By flattening them out on railroad tracks. By putting them in State Fair medallions. By sticking them in penny looter slots. By handing out handfuls of them this Halloween when we run out of Butterfingers.

Join the ranks of the young geezers and save the penny. Use and spend it, so that we can go back to the practice of young people putting pennies in jars and learning thrift. Save the penny and you won't see juvenile delinquents turning up like bad pennies. Save the penny. Stick with the "ba dadda da dum."



Bob Wisler

Give us this day, our daily pancakes

I sympathize with people who write letters to newspapers warning readers not to start dangerous habits. Don't start smoking, drinking, gambling, fooling around, or whatever, they warn.

Once you start a dangerous habit, it can ruin your life, they say. I know what they mean. I have a problem with pancakes. I also wish to warn readers: If you haven't started a pancake habit, don't, they'll take over your life.

You'll find yourself, as I have done, sneaking out of the house to eat more pancakes, lying about how many pancakes you have eaten, and eating alone so that you can eat more without scornful advice from a dining companion.

IT STARTED innocently enough. I used to eat for breakfast eggs, bacon or sausage, hash browns and whole wheat toast (my concession to good health).

Then I started worrying about cholesterol and eating too many eggs. I decided to switch breakfast food. I opted for healthy cereal which tasted like sawdust with milk on top and healthy bran toast with little or no butter.

But why go to restaurant to get overcharged for a meal like that? It's no fun being served a breakfast which saves you practically no labor, nor the discomfort of toiling over a hot stove. Might as well eat at home.

Home just wasn't the same. Nobody there. Loneliness. At the restaurants, at least, the waitresses were glad to see me. In fact, they often seemed like the only ones who were glad to see me, for days at a stretch. Here comes a tip.

On good days there was nothing like solitude, time to ruminate and read the paper while being served breakfast and cup after cup of coffee.

What to eat was the problem. I didn't want to worry about eggs, but I wanted more than cereal of toast. Joan, the waitress, suggested I try pancakes. She told me she ate them every day. I ordered them. They were delicious.

I SOON found myself ordering them several days a week, then every day. It got to be a joke. Joan would say, "the usual?" and conceal a snicker as she eyed my waistline.

I would nod, not wishing to talk about it. Let me tell you, I began to believe there was nothing like pancakes loaded with great dollops of syrup and butter. This went on month after month. My 32-inch waistline changed. I kept looking for pants sales so that I could find pants which were comfortable.

People made jokes. I merely said that everyone knows one's metabolism changes after one has stopped smoking.

The worst part was the pretense.

I would walk into a restaurant where people knew me and study the menu as if I couldn't decide on which of many dishes to order. I would ask about hot cinnamon rolls or if Special K was available, to throw them off track. Then, as if I had finally come to a difficult decision, I would say, "I think I will have an order of pancakes, with link sausage, grilled." The waitress and anyone nearby who knew me would laugh behind their hands.

IN THE END, I resigned myself to my fate. I went each day to the same restaurant where I started my shameful habit. I sat in the corner, a solitary figure, my stomach enjoying itself immensely while I kept telling myself, "I can stop anytime I want to. I just don't want to, not yet."

Then I tried to stop. I would stay away for days, even weeks, but the craving got the best of me. Each morning when I awoke, the first thing I thought of was, I had to hurry, to shower, shave and dress, to get to the restaurant before the pancakes went off the special price.

I don't know the answer yet, but I have talked to other people with addictions. People who go to Weight Watchers, alcoholics anonymous, gamblers anonymous. I have met other pancakeaholics. We have formulated a plan.

We will follow a 12-step program, patterned after other programs. The first step is to admit to others that we are powerless over pancakes — that our waistlines have become unmanageable.

The last step involves carrying the message to other addicts. If anyone is interested, we will hold a meeting every Thursday morning at the Golden Lantern restaurant. Dry toast and soggy cereal will be served. We will look the pancakes in the eye and defeat them.



Jackie Klein

Dr. Willard hypes his wonder water

Dr. John Willard is coming to Southfield tomorrow to hype his new product on TV.

Who, you may ask, is Willard? According to those in the know, he's neither quack nor witch doctor. Soon, we're told, his invention will be getting even more rave notices.

His formula isn't being touted as patent medicine or a magic cure-all, but thousands of users believe it is, and that's what makes the story fascinating.

Willard, Professor Emeritus of the South Dakota School of Mines Chemistry Department at Rapid City and holder of 38 patents, discovered and invented what is known as "Willard Water." The formal name is actually Catalyst Altered Water.

The major catalyst is powdered lignite coal. Other ingredients are silicate, calcium chloride, epsom salts, castor oil specially treated with sulphuric acid and, of course, water.

Congressional testimony concludes there are no ill effects from external or internal use of the placebo for humans, animals or plants.

GUZZLERS of Willard Water are lauding the product as medicine and more. They're bathing in it, putting it on their skin, spraying it on their plants and feeding it to their dogs. Willard Water devotes say it can cure emphysema, clear up acne and grow giant plants. It's also used as a cleaner. Some women mix it with shampoo and laundry detergent.

These heavy reports were substantiated before the Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care of The Select Committee on Aging, U.S. House of Representatives, 98th Congress, second session in July 1980 in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Willard and the distributors of his water don't promote it as a medicine. But its healing effects are volubly touted by its users.

From healed cuts to relief of arthritis and backaches, literally thousands of consumers are praising the product's alleged ability to make bodies function better.

Even plant fanciers with brown thumbs report their greens have doubled in size after they're sprayed for only a few days with the "holy" water.

AS IS THE case with most notable inventions, the discovery of what Willard Water ingredients can do when mixed correctly with clean water (preferably distilled) happened by accident. It was when Willard was conducting an experiment for his son.

Exhaustive tests at several major research centers conclude that the water causes no harmful side effects. But nobody said it helps a sick person except persons who think they're sick.

Willard figures his water's major plus is its ability to allow living cells to function to their maximum efficiency within a reduced time span following application or ingestion. That's saying a mouthful if you understand what it means.

I can dig that plants sprayed with Willard Water require less fertilizer than those treated with ordinary water and that a once of WW will unclog your drain. But the human mind works in strange ways.

If you think the product can cure your ulcer, you probably don't have the condition to begin with. Your imaginary ill could be psychosomatic. Or maybe you'll really feel better because you're sure Willard Water is a miracle cure.

Testimonials from users say WW sprayed on baby's bottom clears up diaper rash in 24 to 48 hours. WW, they say, is great for burns, insect bites, tired aching muscles, tennis elbow, pimples, sore throats, pink eye and hangovers.

Just add a little WW to Alka-Seltzer or aspirin and your headache will go away. Take two aspirin or Alka-Seltzer with plain water and you'll probably feel even better. At least it's cheaper.

Tools and money don't mix

I am, helplessly, a geegeaw geek.

As a teenager, I studied with interest those small ads you sometimes find buried in the back of magazines. Usually the ads are squat and dark, riding just below some alluring sketch from Frederick's of Hollywood.

ACNE, they might say, to catch your attention. It always caught mine. My eyes would practically bug out of my face, and it didn't really have much to do with the Frederick's ad.



Mike Scanlon

As a part-time candy store clerk, I was desperately doing battle with what the ads called facial blemishes, my first exposure to an occupational hazard. But my fascination didn't have much to do with that, either.

What I was interested in were the devices, the tiny, plastic, needle-less syringes that were supposed to make life a joy once more.

As any geegeaw geek can testify, all virtually useless knick-knacks exist only to make life a joy.

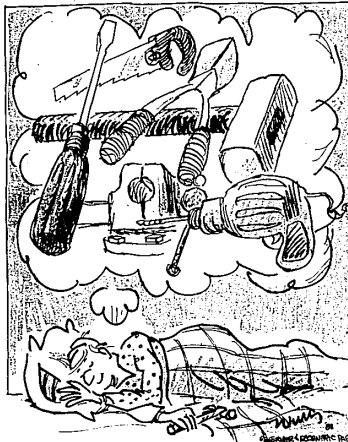
THE MAIN ATTRACTIONS, the things that bring my checkbook out of my pocket like a feat of magician's legerdemain, are tools. I have more tools than you can shake a drop-forged, chrome-steel, 17-milimeter stick at.

I have a broad definition of tools. A lot of them are very weird-looking, especially the kind you turn up in Army surplus catalogues trucked out by the thousands from some array of Quonset huts in south Texas.

Who could help ordering MP-402, Oct. 1951, Garment, Protective, Gas Attack, Individual? I kept that for five years before I needed it to spray insecticide on an apple tree last spring.

The troublesome thing with tools, at least with large accumulations of tools, is what to do with them. All. Generally speaking, unless you get a whole mess of tools from some relative who dies, you gather tools one or two at a time. At no single point does it seem worthwhile to shell out \$150 for a really good, multi-drawer toolbox on wheels.

So at the moment I have four tool boxes full of tools. Since one of the folk-wisdom hallmarks of a good mechanic is that all he needs to fix a car is a screwdriver and an adjustable wrench, you also should be



able to figure just adept I am at using all these tools.

A couple weeks ago I was tuning up a car and I dropped a small screw inside the distributor. That happened to me once four years ago and it ruined my whole day. I had to take the whole distributor out of the car and turn it upside down to get the screw out. It took two hours.

NO PROBLEM now, though. After that ugly incident I bought a pick-up tool with a mirror and a tiny set of tongs at the end. Six months after that, thinking I might need extra help, I bought a pick-up tool with a magnet at the end. Later I bought a screwdriver with a set of magnetic tips.

It took me 30 minutes to find one of those tools, five minutes to retrieve the screw, and 45 minutes to locate the other two tools and put the set of three in the same box.

Then there's the problem of friends who want to borrow tools. The handy thing about writing this column is that it gives me a chance to tell Frank he still has my 13-mm offset wrench. Remember Frank — check under the hood before starting the car.

Riding a bike is not (groan!) child's play

Oh, the stigma of being the mother of the only child in the entire neighborhood who can't ride a still two-wheeled bicycle.

At the ripe "old" age of 5, my dear son still hasn't mastered this simple art of balancing that his clever peers have conquered as early as 3- and 4-years-old. Oh, where have I failed as a mother? Again.

ANYONE WHO has ever had the thrill of running up and down the sidewalk supporting a tottering child on a learning, swerving and tipping bike knows my dilemma.

You get the definite feeling — as your breathing becomes labored and your back gets down to some serious aching — that this child has absolutely no sense of balance whatsoever.

In fact, the longer you continue this exercise in futility, you may think it's a miracle that this short person can even walk without bobbing and waving from side to side.

I hate it when Jimmy starts humming to himself as I'm huffing and puffing, running alongside of him. He



Nancy Walls Smith

acts as if he were out for a Sunday drive, gawking at the neighbors, taking in the scenery, completely oblivious to the task at hand and my waning patience.

"Think balance Jimmy — think balance," I shout, trying to remind him of our exact purpose for this stunt every day. I'm not out here to amuse the neighbors.

"Don't yell at me, mom," he replies.

Right. I don't want to give the child a complex. I don't want him to become so traumatized by his failure at biking that he grows up with a twisted and tortured psyche. I can just see him on the psychiatrist's couch years

from now explaining that the root of all his problems stem from when his insensitive mother forced him to learn to ride a bike when he was 5 years old.

"Life was just never the same after that, Doc."

AT LEAST that's the way it all seemed yesterday.

This afternoon, he took his problem to a "higher" authority and asked his father, "Dad, what did you do to help you learn to ride a bike when you were a kid?"

His dad explained that he just got on his bike and told himself he didn't care if he fell down or not — he was going to ride that bike.

So, whether it's due to his father's clever psychology, his mother's weary muscles, or Jimmy's own persistence and great skill, it gives me great pride to formally announce that

James Keith Smith (alias "Jimmy") rode his two-wheeled bike all the way down the block and back, without training wheels, totally unassisted.

There is great joy (and relief) in the Smith house tonight.