

Opinion

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We are thankful; our spirit's intact

AS THANKSGIVING day rolls around once again, we are wont to look about us to give thanks for what we have. It is often hard in these troubling days to put our blessings in proper perspective.

We seem to always live in tumultuous times. Good news is followed by bad. The economy improves and then plants close, companies shut down and employees are laid off. Our governments seem to be staying on course and then there is a flurry of unfortunate activity and our relative tranquillity is threatened once again.

And so we go into the last years of the 20th century hoping that we can stave off war, economic disaster, disease, catastrophic social problems and even the planet-threatening effects of our insatiable consumption of the earth's resources.

THE SERIOUS problems abound. We are no closer and could be further away from ever achieving any kind of agreement limiting nuclear weapons. Our relationship with Russia is no better and may be worse.

The Middle East remains a tinder box, which could be set off by unwise or reckless actions of any of a host of countries. The present national administration seems to be becoming bogged down in the quagmire of Middle East politics just as the previous administration did.

We are supporting a war in Central America, and there is almost an ever-present threat of direct U.S. troop involvement. The proliferation of nuclear arms makes catastrophic war a possibility on almost every continent.

WE ARE a country in a transition economically and socially. The industrial society is gone, being replaced by an economy based on service and information. Where once we were pre-eminent in the manufacture of almost everything for our use and the world's, today we import far more than we export. More people are employed in the

fast-food industry than in making durable goods. We manufacture pizza and hamburgers rather than steel.

We battle against spiralling crime rates, welfare dependence, AIDS and drugs and seem to be losing on every front.

AND YET, we have, as always, more to be grateful for than to grieve about, more to look forward to than to fear.

We are managing to live with the threat of nuclear war, international terrorism and Soviet expansionism and are still holding our own, still strong, resolute and determined to do what is right for our own self-interest and the peace of the world.

Our governments, national, state and local, contain weak links and humans capable of major errors of judgment, but we are still blessed with governments that are the servants of the people and responsive to their constituencies rather than governments with tyrants ruling over us.

We have a free economy that serves most people well, and there is in the land a spirit of entrepreneurial ingenuity that promises to make our future work lives even more meaningful.

WE HAVE an abundance of wealth and have to work fewer hours to earn basic sustenance than did our parents, or their parents.

We have, for the most part, a country that has enjoyed a long tenure as a free people whose opportunities for enrichment of life, self and national and personal character, still seem boundless.

We have a society that is more spiritual than at most times in history and we rely on God to help us through the difficult periods. Our national spirit says that whatever our problems, we will persevere and the more difficult the challenge, the more glorious the triumph.

We can be very thankful for what we have.



Affluence is a poor excuse

SOMEWHERE along the line, responsibility comes with the money. No excuses really, especially when you're an adult.

Seems reasonable enough, for sure. But the facts show otherwise when it comes to parents' most important responsibility — their kids.

The problem is littered with illustrations, but adults' attitudes make it difficult to solve.

Recently this newspaper published what many public officials already know. Alcohol abuse is a major problem among our youth. But alcohol abuse is only the symptom.

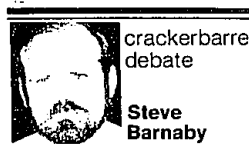
PARENT NEGLECT is the real problem.

Our latest example is the mass surveillance and ticketing of young people at shopping areas along Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills. Sounds parochial. But of the 43 young people ticketed, only 10 were from Farmington Hills.

The others were from surrounding communities including Livonia, West Bloomfield, Southfield and Bloomfield Hills.

Farmington Hills police Sgt. Charles Nebus describes the problem.

"What happens among the 12- to 15-year-olds is that their parents drop them off (at a shopping center) while



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

they go to dinner or to another social engagement, leaving their kids unsupervised until 10 p.m."

Nebus went on to describe how teens between 16 and 18 "come with an abundance of money in their pockets and driving newer model, high performance cars."

MOST OF the offenses are minor — trespassing, disturbing the peace, littering, disorderly conduct and reckless driving.

The other, possession of alcohol, is indicative of a very serious problem with which this society is reluctant to deal.

But the biggest problem is parents who think their responsibilities are fulfilled by living in an affluent community, sending their children to good schools and providing their children with material possessions.

It's tough to imagine what kind of

parent would dump their kid at a shopping center, left unsupervised — until you realize it's your neighbor, or maybe even yourself doing it.

We do fall into this kind of conduct pretty easily. Even adults are influenced by peer conduct.

The problem has been a constant one since suburbs came into being. I vividly recall attending a conference a few years back where a group of parents were organizing to deal with children in trouble. A noble effort, for sure.

BUT THE BOTHERSOME theme that ran throughout the evening was something on the order that parents really couldn't do much if their kids were trouble-makers. It was all the kids' fault.

What baloney. Most of the time, parents can do something about providing a role model and working with their children.

But one thing is for sure. You can't throw your child in a corner, no matter how much candy you give them, and expect them to amuse themselves for long.

Neither can you dump your child off at a shopping center with a wad of cash and expect that to be sufficient parental guidance.

It just doesn't work that way.

'Adoption option' widely ignored

A POLITICAL friend toured a state-supported facility for unwed mothers and came back appalled.

The girls, she reported, are imbued with the radical doctrine that they can raise a child themselves and don't need a man's help. State welfare will subsidize them, of course.

Next I began hearing how attorney Noel Keane of Dearborn arranges deals for surrogate mothers to bear babies for childless couples.

It seems there is such a severe shortage of adoptable babies that couples are willing to pay a fertile woman \$10,000 for her childbearing services.

And this in a nation with one of the highest illegitimate birth rates in the industrialized world.

WELL, COUNSELORS just don't tell unmarried mothers about the adoption option.

That view, first uttered by my political friend, was fleshed out in a scholarly magazine called Child Welfare, published by the Child Welfare League of America Inc. I stumbled across the current issue in Schoolcraft College's Brainerd Library.

Professor Edmund W. Meach of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana cites national studies showing that fewer than 5 percent of pregnancies among unmarried adolescents result in adoptions.

Why so few adoptions? More abortions . . . societal acceptance of unwed parenthood . . . subsidies from the state, March suggests. Then he drops his bombshell.

"Usually, no options other than keeping (the baby) are considered."

Counselors of the teen mothers "assume that pregnant adolescents have little or no interest in the adoption option."

THEY ASSUME wrong.

March quizzed 320 pregnant, unmarried girls ages 13-19 at 35 sites in an anonymous Midwestern state.



Tim Richard

He asked whether they would consider adoption "if your child would have a better chance in life with another family," if they could meet the adopting family first, and so on.

Usually, 20-30 percent answered yes to a question, confirming the professor's hunch they would agree to adoption if anyone counseled them about adoption.

The 186 non-white girls tended to be less favorable toward adoption, but March concluded their response was favorable enough to warrant counseling them, at least.

(Incidentally, 45 percent of those 320 unwed teen mothers already had one child and were expecting a second.)

LAST WEEK I scoffed in print at Agnes Mansour, outgoing director of the state Department of Social Services, for suggesting that societal mores were the cause of our astronomical illegitimate birth rate, and that state government could do little to change it.

Now you understand why I scoffed.

It appears 20-30 percent of babies would have a better chance in life if their unwed mothers were counseled — even encouraged — to let them be adopted by eager childless couples.

Kids in two-parent homes have fewer learning problems, fewer diseases, less chance of living in poverty and a drastically reduced chance of going to prison later on.

Their mothers would have a better chance to finish school, too, and avoid the morass of the Welfare Culture.

Incidentally, more adoptions would free up more welfare money for our schools.

Freedom counts ACLU is bullish on civil liberty

THEY CAN BE very irritating at times, those folks from the American Civil Liberties Union. When it comes to freedoms — of speech, of religion, of expression — they just don't know when to stop.

Thank goodness. Certainly most of you have rolled your eyes to the ceiling and asked for patience after hearing of the latest ACLU case.

A plan for drug-free work places? The ACLU opposes it. An attempt to keep drunk drivers off the road? The ACLU says it is unconstitutional. School locker searches for weapons? No can do, says the ACLU.

The ACLU has even supported the rights of racists to hold public markets. The ACLU does not support racism; it does support the idea that constitutional rights, such as the right of assembly, must be protected at all times, not just when it is convenient or palatable.

IF EXTREMISM in support of liberty is no vice, as Barry Goldwater claimed, then zealotism in support of civil liberties is a virtue. If you doubt that, talk briefly with your fellow suburbanite who nearly got a government-paid stay in a Yugoslavian prison



Rich Perlberg

for that most heinous crime, participating in a peaceful demonstration.

The ACLU, no doubt, is taking a beating in some corners because it has prevented a Nativity scene from being displayed in front of Birmingham City Hall. Actually, the ACLU didn't prevent anything; the U.S. Constitution did. That's a small but essential point that is often overlooked.

But without the ruckus raised by the ACLU, the Nativity scene would not have been disturbed. Instead it was hidden in storage for a couple of years during interminable court proceedings. Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed what the stubborn city commission should have accepted a long time ago: city governments should promote public safety and clean streets, not religions.

THERE IS a feeling sometimes spoken that the ACLU should keep its nose

out of a Birmingham matter. That not only forgets that the suit was initiated by a Birmingham resident, but it also is uncomfortably reminiscent of southerners who blamed outside agitators for stirring up blacks who otherwise, we were led to believe, would happily forego their right to vote.

Do most people care where the Nativity scene rests? Probably not. But that does not diminish the importance of the issue. The city should not be singling out a preferred religion, which is precisely what it is doing. There was not, if you recall, a display in front of city hall during Yom Kippur.

If the city wants to be in the position of favoring religions, then it should put its principles where its wallet is and refuse to accept taxes from any residents other than those who profess to be Christians.

There are some who will undoubtedly think I am criticizing the Nativity scene. I am not. I look forward to seeing it this Christmas at the St. James Episcopal Church. That's where it was displayed this year and that's where it should be.

And the ACLU will be back in court defending some other civil liberty. That's where it should be.