

points of view

Reading: a basis for growing, learning

Between the applause and autographs, I was embarrassed, yet delighted.

Students from Joyce Mecoli's fifth-grade class at Beechview Elementary School proved this week that young minds are sharp and creative, and always full of surprises.

After a brief talk about the newspaper profession and what we do here at the Observer, I was besieged with questions — all thought up by these youngsters who will soon complete their elementary school education and move on to bigger and better things.

Their questions were good, well

thought out, and helped me paint an accurate picture of my career and life for the class.

They wanted to know how reporters gather information, whether we get "fan mail," where we get paper used to print the Observer, and who does my work when I'm on vacation.

DO REPORTERS use the telephone or do personal interviews? Do we take our own photographs? Do people ever get mad at us?

I was invited to speak as part of Michigan Reading Month, celebrated by several Farmington schools, including Beechview. My reward was



Casey Hanes

special — applause from the class and a long line of students waiting for my autograph. That's a first, kids!

If they learned one thing from our talk, I hope it's the importance of good communication. Whether they choose to be reporters, or engineers,

or musicians, communicating with people is of ultimate importance in any job.

And part of good communicating involves reading, absorbing and understanding what is read, and applying this information to everyday life.

ONE OF the things stressed by Farmington educators, who recently revised the district's definition of reading, is the importance of reading to everyone — not only students.

"This is not just a teaching philosophy, but a philosophy for all time," Farmington reading specialist Carolyn Masalak said last year. She

called it a "lifetime pursuit."

She's right.

If everyone continues to read, whether fiction, non-fiction, historical romance, self-help books, or newspapers or magazines, we're bound to be better informed.

We're continuing our self-education.

I have loved to read, since the days of Nancy Drew mysteries and an introduction to poetry in high school. I continue to read not only for enjoyment, but because studying different writing styles will make me a better reporter.

MANY OF Joyce Marcoli's fifth graders appear to have a good grasp on life and have developed communication skills that will lead them into adulthood. Their questions to me were developed from a variety of family backgrounds, interests and a good educational base, which includes reading.

If students can develop a love of reading at an early age, chances are they'll carry that into their adult lives.

Then they can call reading an enjoyable "hobby" and a basis for growing and learning, instead of just "homework."

Motivation spells victory

NOW IT'S Rick Wiener's turn to be embarrassed.

For months the Democratic state chairman had gloated over the spectacle Republicans had made of themselves with the Pat Robertson phenomenon, rump conventions, court fights and split delegations.

Wiener boasted that Michigan Democrats would do it better in their March 26 caucuses. He was right only to the extent that the caucuses operated smoothly. There were a few hitches over people showing up at the wrong caucus site, but nothing scandalous.

But now Wiener is saddled with the Jesse Jackson phenomenon.

COLEMAN YOUNG said it best: Jackson has never run anything but his mouth; he's a clergyman who has never pastored a church; and he's a politician who has never won an election.

It's almost as true about Robertson who, despite never having served a day in public office, feels divinely called to the highest and toughest governmental job in the land. (To give him credit, Robertson does have a law degree and some business acumen. But running a government isn't the same as running a church, and it definitely isn't the same as running a business.)

How, then, did both Michigan political parties, despite their different methods of picking national convention delegates, find their flocks affiliated with charismatic but unqualified preachers drawing 45 to 55 percent of the vote?

THE REPUBLICAN answer we



Tim Richard

The folks who support Robertson and Jackson were motivated. They labored mightily. They learned the procedures and followed them. I give them credit.

know already. When no one was paying much attention in June of 1986, the Robertson folks quietly fielded a multitude to run for Republican precinct delegates in the August primary.

In the Democratic case, we have a party supported by maybe 1.5 million Michigan voters, but fewer than 200,000 turned out for the presidential caucuses. With a pathetic one-seventh turnout, it's easy for a zealous kike like supporters of Jackson, with less than one-third poll support, to give the impression they have a majority.

I confess predicting, though not in print, that Michigan would be the state where Massachusetts Gov. Mike Dukakis would pull away from

the pack and take a good 45 percent. As Coleman YOUNG said in Saturday night to Oakland Democratic headquarters in Ferndale, I thought I was right. In one after another of the Observer & Eccentric towns, Dukakis was rolling up marks of 48 to 71 percent.

What I failed to watch were the gargantuan turnouts in Pontiac and Royal Oak Township. The same kind of thing happened in Detroit, Flint, Saginaw — not merely overwhelming percentages for Jackson but humongous turnouts. Dukakis won his congressional districts with votes of 3,000 and 4,000. Jackson won his with votes of 8,000 and 11,000 and 25,000.

Meet Mr. Dum-Dum — not as smart as I thought I was.

The folks who support Robertson and Jackson were motivated. They labored mightily. They learned the procedures and followed them. I give them credit.

BOTH PARTIES have much to be embarrassed about when candidates whose only credentials are oratory do so well.

All the more reason the Michigan Legislature should bring back the state-run presidential primary, with registration by party, for 1992.

Republicans were off base with a process that began 2½ years before the presidential election. Democrats tried hard but still can't defend a caucus system that draws only one voter in every seven.

Well, I've admitted my goof. Now the GOP and the Democratic chiefs should do the same.

Drug battle boosts Jesse

THE MYSTIFIED, who wonder why Jesse Jackson is winning, should come out from under their rocks.

They should have been in middle America Michigan when Jesse Jackson was cheered by the students at Southfield High or as he talked with the kids at Bloomfield Hills Lahser.

They may have learned a lesson that many of those students already know. They may have learned the lesson that many people of my post-war generation share with them.

The story, with some variation, goes like this.

In what seems like yesterday, I had a friend who was young, healthy, handsome and athletic.

HE HAD the whole wide world in his hands, as the song of that time said. Whatever he wanted, he could have had. People looked at my friend as a leader for the future, a person who would make his mark and leave this world a better place.

No good reason could be found to believe otherwise.

But that friend has been dead now for almost 20 years. The sight of his once healthy body, withering and wasting away from drugs, is the scene that sears my memory.

We were at a party, seeing each other for the first time in two years. I was shocked. This once promising person was a junkie, a heroin addict and rather proud of his state.

"Don't worry, I'm not like a lot of



Steve Barnaby

We want a leader who is willing to address that issue. And we don't care if that leader is black, white, yellow or brown.

those other guys. I can handle it," he said.

Out of all the vast world of opportunities this brilliant mind could have grasped, he opted, instead, for the lethal world of drugs.

A few weeks later, he was dead from a heroin overdose. His words to me, "I can handle it," have haunted me ever since.

I've hated drug abuse and the profits made from it to this day.

Now, that many years ago, few folks were attuned to drug abuse, real drug abuse — the kind that destroys.

OUR COUNTRY'S leaders really didn't pay much attention. They

shook their fingers at the marijuana-smoking crowd of the '60s. They told us that "hard" drugs were a problem reserved for the ghetto.

Little money went into fighting what is today our major social problem, one that threatens this country's foundation. The majority of our country's leaders continue to turn their backs on this crisis.

And what many political analysts and politicians fail to realize is that generations exist that know the dangers of drugs and the harm they are doing to our country.

They also should realize we want a leader who is willing to address that issue. And we don't care if that leader is black, white, yellow or brown.

And that is the concern Jackson addresses and the other candidates have completely missed.

This country has survived and prospered in spite of more than 20 years of free trade and trade embargoes, wars and communists, fascist and fanatics.

But our country, like my long dead friend, is slowly withering away in the face of the illegal drug that overwhelms us.

Many in my generation know and see it. Many in the next know even better.

And that's why Jesse Jackson is winning.

For those of us in the know, his color is very incidental. His cause supremely consequential.

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