

points of view

Keep on flying — it's the American way

REMEMBER YOUR first ride on an airplane?

Mine was in the early 1960s, when my sister and I traveled — alone — to visit grandparents in Florida.

It was quite an adventure with extra special treatment, like the airport escort while switching planes. That trip set the agenda for many years of enjoyable air travel.

We made it safe and sound. Not a worry in the world.

But today, there are global concerns involving airlines and air disasters, most recently focused on the United Flight 811 disaster near Hawaii in which nine people were sucked out of the plane to their

The skies simply aren't as friendly anymore.

deaths. Obviously not the thrilling ride they had in mind when they boarded.

How about those who lived to hear the roar of the fuselage ripping apart, feel the wind at 20,000 feet and watching the gaping hole in the side of the plane? One passenger got back on the plane, saying if she didn't do it right away, she would have never flown again.



Casey Hans

A Birmingham attorney who has worked on litigation for families of the disastrous Northwest Flight 255 lived through the ordeal — and will now be able to better relate to his clients.

"You focus on how fearful is the

impact going to be. Is it going to be a belly landing? How long will we float? How long will we be in the water?" he told a reporter, relating his thoughts.

WE ALL clasp our hands in prayer these days but go on flying for both business and pleasure. It's the American way.

And we face the fact that air travel has aged, even though not very gracefully.

With deregulation, competition is greater so replacement of the big birds doesn't occur as it might have years ago. Overall, the fleets are just older. There is also more air terror-

ism in the world today.

The skies simply aren't as friendly anymore.

And I don't love it as much as I did 10 or 20 years ago. I now get on a plane when it's a necessity and usually have a slight gnawing in the pit of my stomach as we take off and land. I think about the stress cracks that may balloon into a major tear as the plane begins a routine flight.

Perhaps it may get to a point where passengers will verify the type and age of the plane on which they are booking a flight. Maintenance histories and schedules will become part of a travel agent's lit-

erary package to customers. Maybe the government will step in once again to regulate the industry. Who knows?

THIS I do know: Hawaii will someday be my destination for a vacation, despite the recent air mishap near there and one less than one year ago over the islands.

I will make the reservations, board the plane with butterflies, say my prayers to the One who might be able to control the destiny of that big bird, and hopefully say "Aloha" when arriving — and leaving.

Casey Hans is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

Fred DeLano: Old-time newsman leaves legacy

SOMEHOW IT seems appropriate that this column is being written in the early dawn. It's coincidence, of course. Lots to do today and too few hours to accomplish all that needs to be done. But appropriate nevertheless.

You see, early morning was Fred DeLano's time and this column is a tribute to Fred who deserves a kind farewell from all of us who knew him for so many years.

As newspaper readers, you knew him as Fred DeLano, author of "Through Bilfocals." Others of you knew him as Plymouth activist, University of Michigan fan-extraordinaire, public relations master and one heck of a storyteller.

But no matter in what guise, Fred was important — to this newspaper, to journalism and to the community.

You have a finer newspaper delivered to your door because of Fred DeLano. You see, he made an indelible impression on this newspaper.

He very well would flinch at these accolades. As was written in his obituary, Fred preferred to "compose paragraphs that entertain, that tell of people and things, now and then relating something you didn't know."

Well, he did do that. But he did much more for all of those he touched.

Oh, now don't get me wrong. Fred was no angel. He lived the life of the old-time newspaperman who very well could imagine in the movies. He



Steve Barnaby

drank too much, smoked too many cigarettes, worked too many hours and played too hard, too often.

Being the fine newspaper person he was, Fred would be unhappy if this farewell hid the truth. Credibility, he knew, is the cornerstone of any newspaper.

But none of that diminishes Fred's contribution to our corner of the world in suburban Detroit.

HE HELPED mold many careers. He would gently scold young reporters who were reluctant to get the entire story. But he would also reassuringly help those same young reporters who needed help in developing an angle.

When I came to the Observer 17 years ago, Fred was one of the kingpins. But he never bragged, never really had a whole lot to say. He didn't have to say much.

His writing was impeccable, his

news judgment near perfect, his dedication to getting the story undeterred.

No matter how early in the morning you would come in, Fred would already be at his desk, coffee steaming, cigarette burning and typewriter clacking.

He would be in the midst of sculpting a news story like it was a piece of art, never missing a detail, highlighting every nuance.

If Fred looked at your copy and said, "good story," you felt great. If he said, "the folks on main street want to know more than you've got here," you would unhesitatingly get the information. Meeting Fred's standard was a goal of every other reporter.

The other night while helping to put together his obituary, I stood with a handful of his columns in hand. The newsroom was mostly empty and quiet. I looked around and remembered for a minute or two, clutching the columns extra hard, eyes welling a bit.

But then it was back to work, the way Fred would do it. A deadline had to be met.

Like many of you, I'll miss the magic of Fred DeLano's column, his easy smile and dedication to this age-old craft.

Thanks Fred. Rest easy.

Officials skirt open meetings act

LIFE IN the public sector is worse than we imagined. Elected officials can get together for hours at a time and not say anything worthwhile. At least nothing that you would want to hear.

That's their version anyway.

In recent weeks, elected bodies in West Bloomfield and Southfield met in unposted meetings in which they did some or all of the following: they talked, they ate, they bickered, they aired differences, they shared stories.

They didn't deliberate. At least, that's the way they put it. If they deliberated, their meetings would have fallen under the auspices of the Open Meetings Act. Notice of the meetings would have been posted, minutes would have been taken and the public would not only be allowed at the meetings, the meetings would have to be reasonably accessible.

None of the above was the case with the Southfield and West Bloomfield meetings.

THE SOUTHFIELD City Council met in a closed session just once. In a Southfield Eccentric article, council president Eli Robinson had called council members "discourteous, disrespectful, abusive and petty." Several council members wanted to talk about that. But they didn't want to do it in public. So they didn't.

"The session gave council members an opportunity to yell at each other in private in the council study



Rich Perlberg

room in a public facility," said John Beras, Southfield's city attorney.

One might think that it is of public interest when a city council gets together to talk about how it does its business. Not in Southfield. The city attorney said they weren't deliberating, so the public wasn't invited.

"That may be a gray area," said Beras. "But would it have been better if they'd met at a restaurant?"

WHY NOT? That's what the West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Commission does. To get to know each other better, the commissioners meet for dinner at Bloomfield Charley's prior to their regular meetings.

Originally, commission president Keith Murphy was gracious enough to be embarrassed about it. He said no harm was intended, but "if it walks like a meeting and talks like a meeting, golly, it must be a meeting. We blew it."

He blew it again last Thursday. Deciding that his munch-filled meetings didn't violate the Open Meetings Act after all, Murphy announced he would continue the dinner sessions and offered to pay the filling fee for

anyone who wished to challenge him in court.

Murphy says that there is only innocent socializing on the menu at Bloomfield Charley's. Then in the next breath he says they meet "to understand what each other's goals and objectives are for parks and recreation."

SO WHAT'S the big deal? Is this something that should rile you, a typical suburban resident? After all, these are not evil people. They are not contemplating sinister deeds.

But they are wrong, flat-out in error. The purpose of the Open Meetings Act is to ensure that the public's business is done in public. There are some well-defined exemptions to the act that allow public bodies to close out the public.

Yelling at a fellow council member or dining at a local restaurant are not among those exceptions. People in public office should find every reason possible to avoid closed sessions. Far too often, they look for loopholes.

When the parks and recreation commission meets again, maybe they should digest this: The offices they hold belong not to them, but to their public.

The folks in Southfield also need to be reminded. Members apparently fade when the door is closed.

Rich Perlberg is the assistant managing editor in charge of Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.



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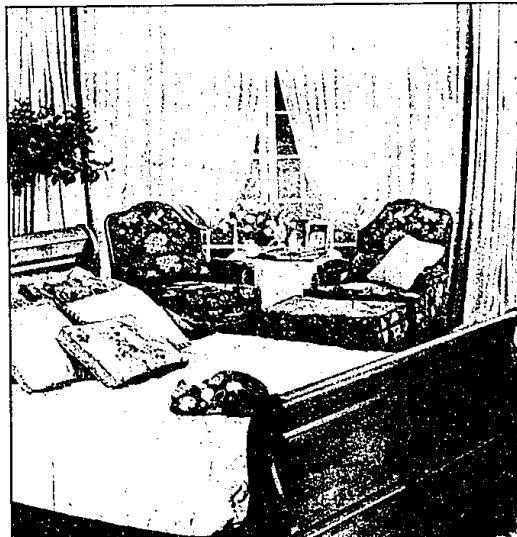
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