

## points of view

## No one protests this holiday

SHHHH! DON'T tell anybody, but one of the biggest religious holidays of the year is almost here and the schools are celebrating it like crazy. So far as I can tell, no one is objecting. I haven't heard about any protests, any angry parents attending school board meetings or running letter-writing campaigns.

No one, from what I have read, has demanded that the decorations come down or that gift exchanges be banned. And if no one else is going to say anything, I'm certainly not going to make an issue of it.

The holiday, of course, is Valentine's Day... no, let's be precise... it's SAINT Valentine's Day. And it's one of the year's major celebrations.

Not to the church, of course. It's not exactly a major feast day. But if you think it's not a big deal, just ask the candy makers and the greeting card peddlers.

Check out the schools where, in some cases, exchanging valentines has been turned into a class project.

BUT THIS day for lovers is of purely Christian origin and came about in much the same way that the Christmas celebrations started.

At least as early as the Fourth Century B.C., the Romans celebrated a fertility ritual dedicated to the pagan god Luperus.

After the early Christian church was established, the Luperian festival was still going strong and the church fathers wanted to find some



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way to usurp it with a Christian ceremony.

Looking around for a saint that had some connection with lovers, they zeroed in on Valentine. He had had the misfortune — or bad judgment — to enrage the mad emperor Claudius II and, in February of the year 270, he was beaten, stoned and beheaded.

But before he was executed, according to legend, he fell in love with the blind daughter of his jailer, miraculously cured her blindness and left her a farewell message which he signed "From Your Valentine."

So, in the 5th Century, Pope Gelasius outlawed the Luperian festival and substituted a similar celebration whose patron saint was Valentine.

The exchange of cards on this day apparently grew out of the Luperian practice of holding a lottery in which young men drew the names of young women who were "assigned" to them for a year.

In the early Valentine celebrations the names of saints were substituted for the women and somewhere along the line the drawing of names

evolved into the exchange of cards.

OF COURSE the modern day popularity of the celebration owes much to the later saints, Hallmark and Russell Stover, but the fact remains that all of those valentines being passed around in the classroom symbolically represent the good saint's farewell note to his lover.

Maybe no one is complaining about all of this because enough of the pagan trappings remain to cloud the religious nature of the holiday. Or maybe since the churches don't really celebrate it, the schools figure it's fair game. I don't know.

But I do know that next month we're going to be celebrating another saint's day, and if you send your kid off to school wearing green, you'll be paying homage to good old Saint Patrick, who, incidentally, was not Irish.

My wife — my significant Polish other — always refused to wear anything green to school on this festive occasion because she was Polish, not Irish, and boy, did she get in trouble with the nuns over that.

But except for an occasional trouble-maker like her, I've heard no protests over the public celebration of this Christian holiday, either.

It's all mighty confusing to me. But if nobody else is protesting, I'm not going to say anything.

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

## Serial rapes changed lives for many women

I STILL think about it every time I come home alone at night.

I look behind me as I drive into the driveway of my West Bloomfield home and pull into the garage. I look behind and around me before I get out of my car. I leave the car light on until the last possible instance.

Then, once again, as I'm going into the house and before I push the button to close the garage door — I survey the garage.

Did I do that before there was a series of rapes in Oakland County, now known to have been perpetrated by Steven Szeman, who as it turned out had lived only a few subdivisions away from me?

No. I didn't. And neither did the thousands of women throughout Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Farmingham, Bloomfield Township and beyond who learned to be afraid during attacks on 10 females, ages 12-61 from April 1987 to March 1988.

"He brought the county to its knees for a year and a half," described Bloomfield Township police Lt. Jeffrey Werner.

"I DON'T think he understood the fear he created in the community," said his attorney, Larry Kaluzny at



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his sentencing last week. "I've handled hundreds of criminal cases but this one was different. He didn't try to hide the fact that he committed these acts. He just wants to know why he did them."

His victims and those of us who were afraid would like to know why, too.

Kaluzny hopes that someday Szeman will get some professional psychiatric help. I wish that somehow that help was mandatory and the results made public.

Perhaps it could shed more light on how a person could terrorize women across an entire county, and yet have a four-year, apparently non-abusive relationship with a girlfriend.

It's more of wish than reality to expect it could result in some early symptoms which could be recognized by trained professionals or alert parents.

For example, we have yet to hear the final story on the two teenage brothers from the Muskegon area who may have molested as many as 55 children ages 2 to 4 at a church nursery. They are 17 and 13. But how much earlier could their problems have been discovered?

BY CHANCE, Royal Oak-based psychologist Ted Braude called on another matter. So I asked him what we all want to know — why?

"To be fair, you have to look at the person's background. What he does may make perverted logical sense in terms of his life experience," Braude carefully said. "It's not black and white — which makes it very difficult to understand."

He then told me his non-professional experience with Michael Masters, his neighbor in Royal Oak, who two years ago confessed to a series of rapes.

Masters, in the computer business, had sold him some computer equipment, Braude reported. When Masters took the equipment out of the box to show it to him, a spider was crawling on it. He was struck, even at the time, that Masters made several attempts to pick up the spider, and once successful, carried it outside and let it go.

Several weeks later he was arrested. "That a man who saved the life of a spider pleaded guilty to six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct..." Braude said.

Szeman, like Masters, said he was pleading guilty to spare his victims. And at his sentencing to a virtual lifetime in prison told them in a barely audible voice that he was sorry.

I can only imagine what the victims have gone through. I hope that knowing he is off the streets will ease their anguish.

But for myself, I don't believe I will ever feel really safe again.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant manager for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

## Harrison's football Hawks merit a public salute

The writer, Clark Reid, is a Farmington Hills resident.

THE JAN. 4 Observer ran a story on Bob Sutter's election to the Michigan High School Football Coaches Hall of Fame.

Isn't it time the people of Farmington Hills did something to express our thanks to the Harrison football program for the pride and honor we have felt for its truly remarkable accomplishments?

• four state championships in nine years.  
• runner-up state champions twice (76 and '81).

• John Herrington selected as Coach of the Decade by the Detroit Free Press.

• Mill Coleman and John Miller honored among the Players of the Decade in the same edition.

• win class B state championship in 1981 and come back to beat the best of Class A in 1982.

• win back-to-back state championships again in 1988-89.

• Mill Coleman beating the Michigan high school record for passing by over 1,000 yards (almost 20 percent better than any other quarter-back in the history of Michigan high school football, his total, 7,464).

## guest column

• undefeated in their last 26 games.

• 189-6 record for the decade of the '80s.

• hundreds of kids whose lives were made richer and fuller for their participation in the Harrison football program.

• thousands of Harrison students, marching band members, cheerlead-

ers, teachers and parents who feel part of the reflected glory.

• put on maybe the most dazzling display of heroic pressure football ever seen — in the final two minutes of the 1989 championship game against DeWitt (starting with the blocked extra point attempt, thank you, Mr. Sutter).

Those who played football for Harrison will tell you as your Jan. 4 story on Sutter confirmed: that the entire coaching staff is responsible for the monumental accomplishments of the program — Herrington, Sutter and Sallow.

They seem like ordinary kids with ordinary athletic abilities when they begin practice for the first time, but the program shapes them into the best in the state, best of the decade.

Do we wait until John Herrington moves on to coach at Michigan State before we show our gratitude?

Whatever develops, some time before the kickoff of the 1990 Harrison season, let's have some kind of a citywide celebration worthy of the remarkable achievements of these remarkable people — the coaches and players of the legendary Harrison Hawks.

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pleasant break, one guaranteed to excite your senses and quicken your pulse. That stop, of course, is your authorized BMW dealership.

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