

points of view

Worries go to top of heap

By Sarah Weiner Keidan
guest columnist

YOU ALL KNOW what a bride does on the day after her wedding: She goes on her honeymoon. But did you ever consider what the mother of the bride does?

This one spent her day in the pouring rain, walking up mounds of garbage in the local landfill, looking for the large envelope which contained all the envelopes with the wedding gift money!

The Sunday evening wedding was a triumph. It was the celebration of a very happy event in our family.

Because the groom was concerned about the safe keeping of any gifts that might be tendered at the party, I arranged for a trusted person to be to collect and take them back to the house.

The following morning I consolidated all the envelopes including the marriage license, the wedding contract and some other incidentals into the large one. While doing so, I decided to clean out my "wedding briefcase" and threw all no-longer-needed lists and papers in the trash. Monday is trash day in my neighborhood.

THE TRASH COLLECTORS arrived before 8 a.m. and took everything I had left at the curb. I then went to exercise class and kept some other appointments. I got home about 1 p.m. in a heavy downpour and decided to make some lunch. The kitchen looked messy, though. I decided to consolidate the gifts into

a large bag so that when the bride and groom stopped by for cocktails before leaving for the airport — they spent their wedding night in a local hotel — they would find everything in one place. All the gift boxes were in carrybags when I reached for the large envelope.

It wasn't there!

It wasn't anywhere! I searched the house. My heart was racing. I was hyperventilating.

But I knew: I had tossed the envelope into the trash. I called the township to get the name of the garbage collection company. I called the company to get my route number and the name of the landfill. I called the landfill. Their computerized system indicated that my truck had dumped at about 11 a.m., and the man on the phone informed me that although he could tell me within 200 feet where my neighborhood load was, it was already buried under about four feet of additional garbage.

So I came out and look. I asked. Sure he said, but it would be like a million to one shot that I'd find anything.

I THREW ON a black slicker raincoat and grabbed a shovel.

I got into my car and drove like a maniac, in the rain, out the freeway to the dump. It was a harrowing ride, but I got to the exit and promptly found the landfill.

A young man in a pickup truck drove me to the site. The mud was ankle-deep. He advised me not to bother getting out of the truck be-

cause it was dangerous and hopeless. But I was compelled. After all, what would I tell the newlyweds?

And so I trudged to the top of the garbage heap. I looked carefully and found... NOTHING!

Reluctantly I left the spot drove toward home. On the way I used the carphone to call the rabbi and the county clerk's office to begin the task of replacing the documents. I composed the letter to the guests.

By the time I got home it was nearly 5 p.m. I sat in the kitchen bereft, cold, exhausted.

Then I decided to call the bride and groom to break the bad news because I didn't want them hearing this in my house at 6 p.m.

THE GROOM ANSWERED. He sounded happy. I asked him to sit down because I had some bad news.

"I don't think we had a break-in this morning, but we did have a small disaster," I began. "The envelope is missing. Today is trash day in the neighborhood and..."

"Say no more," said the groom. "We stopped by at noon and took it." They hadn't thought to leave me a note.

I have decided that the newlyweds owe me a weekend at the King Ranch Spa in Toronto for my troubles.

Sarah Weiner Keidan is a West Bloomfield resident and professor of political science at Oakland Community College.

Nothing is short about these lawsuit winners

HERE'S A dandy category for the game show "Jeopardy." Abbreviations.

NIMBY. That's easy — "not in my back yard." Holler "NIMBY" when you don't want a group home or incinerator in the neighborhood.

ASAP. "As soon as possible." Everyone in an office knows that one.

RHHP. "Rank has its privileges." Military veterans got that ASAP.

WYSI WYG, pronounced "weisy wig." Your computer-wise kids will tell you it means "what you see is what you get."

SLAPP. Wow, that's a new and nasty one. But folks in growing communities had better learn it because it's going around the country.

SLAPP means "strategic lawsuit against public participation." It's what developers do when homeowners, environmentalists and preservationists fight too hard against tearing up God's ecosystem.

I stumbled across SLAPP in the June issue of Planning, a magazine you won't find on the supermarket shelves or chain bookstores. Readers are public officials who deal in land use. The writer is Gary Enos, a New York-based magazine reporter.

SLAPPs are designed to have a chilling effect on folks who speak out against developers' plans or petition government for the redress of grievances. Some authorities say SLAPPs are a threat to freedom of speech. Remember the Bill of



Tim Richard

Rights? We're celebrating its 200th anniversary.

University of Denver researchers have identified 40 SLAPP lawsuits around the country. New York, California and Colorado have seen most of these lawsuits, but they are spreading.

OUR COMMUNITIES in Michigan could see strategic lawsuits against public participation in the next few years.

As I write, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments is circulating its draft plan to curb "urban sprawl" — the eating up of cornfields and lakeshores by developers with no population growth to justify it, and the abandonment of older cities. There is strong, but not unanimous, sentiment for containing urban sprawl.

Michigan is ripe for SLAPP suits because we have thousands of teeny cities, villages and townships.

The ABA members didn't like that. Many of them like to SLAPP people around.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events.

You circulate pamphlets.

And you could get SLAPPED. It happened, Enos said, in Rye, N.Y., to folks who wanted to protect the 18th century home of John Jay, the diplomat and chief justice. The developer who wanted to build luxury homes asked \$30 million damages.

NOW, FILING a lawsuit and winning it are two different things.

Developers are losing most SLAPPs, Enos reports. Their lawyers have found it difficult to pierce the people's freedom of speech defense.

But we in the news business know about these suits. They cost you money to defend. They cost you enormous amounts of time to prepare a defense. You can't do your regular work while you're defending a lawsuit designed to quiet you.

Ultimately, you win, but the suit takes so much start out of you that you're never the same emotionally. You seek a new line of work. You move. I've seen it happen.

Vice President Dan Quayle, himself an ordained lawyer despite his C average, made a speech to the American Bar Association in which he said the U.S. has too many lawyers — 70 percent of the world's supply — and too many lawsuits.

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Give teachers power to make education work

Q. Much has been written lately about empowering teachers. Don't teachers have enough power with their unions and contracts? Do you think this new empowerment idea makes sense, or is it just another fad?

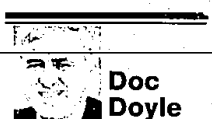
A. Empowerment is the latest educational buzz word.

Yet teacher empowerment is not a new concept. Wendell Hough, of Wayne State University has been infusing this concept in numerous school districts in Michigan since 1979.

And it is effective.

Basically it is a collaborative effort that involves both teachers and administrators in planning and implementation a building improvement program.

It is far removed from the top-down model. The top-down model is where "central office" goes to a conference, becomes mesmerized by a



Doc Doyle

charismatic speaker, returns all excited, shows a supposedly new educational model down the throats of teachers and reports to the board how much teachers like it.

TEACHERS WILL implement such a top-down model but really have nothing personally at stake to see the new educational concept or program is successful.

The whole concept of teacher empowerment or collaboration between administration and teachers hinges on certain basic beliefs. Those beliefs have been articulated by Hough

and paraphrased by this writer. They included:

• The more people are involved in program planning, the more they have at stake to see the program is successful.

• An effective school district or school building educational program will result only when the potential of all parties is released and put into action.

• Positive educational changes occur when administration recognizes that teachers behave the way they do because it makes sense to them. Top administrators must be an integral part as a facilitator of change.

• Teacher empowerment programs must provide for leadership development.

SOME OF MY personal observations as one who believed in involving and sharing decisions with teachers are:

• The weaker the principal the more frightened he is of a teacher empowerment model.

• Many principals and central office staff don't recognize that real power comes from the teachers.

You imply in your question that teachers have enough power in their contracts. Frankly, as a former president of a teachers' organization

who was part of the group that started negotiations in 1965, I consider the contract a separate issue. Reality says it exists and isn't going away.

What is most interesting in all this is that the Michigan Education Association and now local school districts are considering this new "teacher empowerment" concept. Yet Hough

has been doing it for more than 10 years. Maybe more educators should start paying more attention to the good professor. I did. He was my doctoral degree adviser.

James "Doc" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm.

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