

POINTS OF VIEW

Sturgis could be Farmington from the past

The next time I'm headed west on U.S. Highway 12, I'm sure going to slow down and take a good look at Sturgis. Yep, Sturgis, that wide spot in the old Chicago road.

Having had an enjoyable lunch with Carl Holsinger, the affable vice mayor of Sturgis, I think I'd like to see a bit more of that town.

How did I come to meet Holsinger and learn about this slice of small-town Americana in southern Michigan? Well, Sturgis and Farmington exchanged mayors during the annual Michigan Week celebration. There was a luncheon at Marco's Restaurant May 18.

Holsinger and Mayor Donald Easterday were savoring Farmington. Earlier, local officials were doing Sturgis, which is just up the road from White Pigeon in St. Joseph County.

The more I listened to the Sturgis folks describe their town, the more I

realized that could very well be our town 50 or 60 years ago. Farmington today might have been a Sturgis look-alike had the Detroit metropolitan area not grown and gobbled to the west and north.

Yes, Farmington clings to and promotes its small-town image, but really it's one of about 50 suburbs of Detroit. Sturgis today isn't yet within any megapolis' gobbling range. That fact has its good points, and bad.

In Sturgis, there are concerns about the economy (I don't like that just about anywhere in the Rust Belt), and many businesses have headed a few miles south to Indiana where costs are lower. Indeed, one Sturgis official called Indiana "the Mississippi of the north."

Sturgis has a movie theater, a daily newspaper, one radio station. Most of the serious shopping is done in the old central business district that includes



TOM BAER

a Dancer's Department Store. (Farmington had a Dancer's years ago. Remember? It was in the Cook Building on Grand River.)

There is a Wal-Mart, but officials wish it were on the Sturgis tax rolls instead of in a nearby township.

One unusual feature in Sturgis is a city-owned dam which provides up to 20 percent of the electric power.

The populations are about the same, just over 10,000, and the average age for Sturgis is 32, compared to 38 for Farmington. In Sturgis, though, the young people grow up and move away.

"There are just not the kind of high-paying jobs they want to come back to," Holsinger said.

Sturgis students — and plenty of their teachers, too — can earn \$10 an hour in the summertime covering tassels so the steel corn won't get cross-pollinated. Try doing that around Farmington.

Showing that small-town togetherness, Sturgis has developed a close relationship with its "sister city," Wiesloch, Germany. About 50 Sturgisites so far have visited Wiesloch and stayed with local families in the exchange program. Holsinger himself has been across.

"The government over there makes a little more sense. The cities actually

control the villages," he said with a laugh, perhaps remembering that Wal-Mart.

Mayor Exchange Day and Michigan Week are easy to ignore in this fast-paced metropolitan Detroit, although they were a big deal once. For example, Farmington Hills, which surrounds Farmington, doesn't seem to pay as much attention.

The Hills exchanged with Monroe, but we weren't notified until the last minute. Farmington, by contrast, had a complete itinerary posted well in advance.

Well, as far as I'm concerned, Mayor Exchange Day is a fine event. It gives you a chance to meet new people and learn about new places. This year, anyway, the new people and place are worth knowing and knowing about.

Tom Baer is the editor of the Farmington Observer.

Lack of empathy widens gulf between the races

It is impossible for me to empathize with the incredible ordeal being endured by the parents of Deanna Seifert, the girl abducted while sleeping over at a friend's house. With the daughter of my own, supposedly the same age as this young lady, I can sympathize with what they must be feeling.

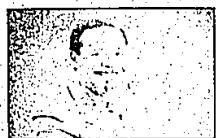
I can imagine what it would be like to have worry for my child constantly gnawing at my insides, fear for her well being a constant hammering in my head, rage toward the person responsible causing a slow burn in my heart. I can imagine less when I think of my child: warm smile, bright eyes and sense of comfort she gives.

I can sympathize with the parents' loss, but I cannot empathize. I cannot feel their pain.

It is impossible for me to sympathize with the four black men arrested for the savage LA beating of truck driver Reginald Denny. Two wrongs don't

make a right, so the saying goes, and to me it was appalling and ridiculous to hear middle-aged black women on TV spouting insane statements like: "Why should our boys be charged for beating Denny when nothing was done to the police who beat King?"

It is impossible for me to sympathize with these individuals, yet I can empathize. I have felt the crowd of fear that being the only black man in an area white people brings. I've stood before from around me a group of white cops intent on keeping me in my subservient place. My ears have been assaulted since the age of six by the hated six letter N word. I've known the shame of exclusion due to the color of my skin. I can empathize with the rage, but cannot sympathize, will not endorse it. The outrage perpetrated against Denny and other passersby in LA is just as wrong as the outrage committed against the health and happiness of the Seifert family.



JEFFREY MILLER

Sympathy and empathy. Blacks say 'Empathize with me. Feel my pain.' Whites said 'I sympathize, I see your problem, but I can't feel it.'

I watched in awe as the 3 a.m. kidnapping of this 10-year-old girl grew first into a media circus, then became a focused, united effort to find the abducted child. Hundreds of volunteers, mostly white, searched every conceivable location. Missing posters sprang up in countless numbers. Thousands of dollars in reward money became available. Candle light vigils and church services were held to keep the flame of hope alive that Deanna Seifert would be found unhurt.

I watched in awe as the King verdict after months resulted in massive destruction of property, tremendous loss of life. I watched the wild behavior of what seemed like thousands of mostly black individuals as they ran amok, looting and beating and burning. I watched as the President toured the area in pristine splendor and listed as political leaders and civil rights activists called for massive aid, financial help for the bleeding city, relief from

poverty and despair.

As I watched the dramas of the kidnapped young lady and the lost hope of a generation unfold, I was struck by a sense of wonder that hundreds of individuals in the white community would mobilize a small army to find one little girl, while hundreds in the black community would wait for someone else to mobilize them, and it was then I understood the racial gulf.

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I sympathize with the Seifert parents; however, that's not enough. If I cannot empathize with them, if I cannot share their pain, how can I expect them to feel mine?

Jeffrey Miller, a Southfield resident, is producer/host of "Transition," seen at 8:30 a.m. on WJON-TV Channel 20.

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