

POINTS OF VIEW

Story helps understanding

Uncle Jimmy. When my husband and I were dating, he'd hand us the key to his cabin in the woods to use for the day.

When we travelled to Europe on our honeymoon, he presented us with currency from each country we'd visit, so we'd have it on arrival.

When we were struggling newly-weds in graduate school at Columbia University in New York City, he'd fly in to take us out to a sleek Manhattan bistro and to theater.

On our first anniversary, he found out what restaurant we picked to celebrate, called and ordered champagne for us and had the whole tab charged to him.

This graduate of the Wharton School of Business of the University of Pennsylvania worked himself up the corporate ladder to become vice president of Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Ohio.

Single, he lived in an elegant penthouse apartment, filled with art and antiques purchased from friends and on his travels.

And his gift for gardening was evident in the flowers and plants he nurtured both inside and on the encircling patio.



JUDITH DONER BERNE

That's where he was found murdered, nearly 25 years ago, at the age of 62. He was the victim of what police believe was a crime perpetrated by another homosexual.

Yes, Uncle Jimmy was homosexual. Most of his family didn't know that — or, if they suspected, didn't pursue it.

He felt forced to live a lifestyle that was hidden from his straight friends and family, with whom he was otherwise very close.

Evenings and weekends, he drank too much, and when he drank, he cried easily.

I later found out that he turned

down a promotion that would have put him at the top of the Ohio "Blues." He was afraid it would hurt the organization if his homosexuality ever became public.

I thought about Uncle Jimmy last Tuesday night as people opposed to three class hours of information for high school students on homosexuality spent four hours sounding their myths and stereotypes before the Birmingham Board of Education.

I thought about his caring, intelligence, his wide range of interests.

I thought also about his torment, a torment which he didn't feel he could share even with his own family. It was a torment that led to his death.

Myths and stereotypes feed on themselves. The Birmingham Schools are offering young people a chance to help break that syndrome. And, they are giving people like Uncle Jimmy a chance to live with grace and dignity, instead of having to be ashamed of what they are.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric. She may be reached by dialing 644-1100, Ext. 242.

Season focuses in on plight of needy

It was the best of times.

It was the worst of times. We all know someone who will remember this holiday season with one or the other of these classic lines. For some, the season will be one of great joy and abundance. For others, it will be a season of struggle and despair.

Of course, none of this is new. It goes on every holiday season — in fact, it goes on every single day of the year. It seems this time of the year just brings it into much sharper focus.

The nightly news brings us the disquieting images of the downtraden in their struggle to find a warm bed and a hot meal, let alone chestnuts roasting on an open fire. The same news show will usually close with a feature about a store like Neiman-Marcus offering a life-size Rolls Royce made out of solid Godiva chocolate for only \$495,000.

More than any other time, the holidays show that we live in a world of extremes.

Ironically, the richest country on Earth is inhabited by some very poor people. Our economic diversity ranges from multi-billionaires to people who live in cardboard boxes. The vast majority of us fall somewhere in between.

The canyon-esque financial disparity is not the only measure of difference among us. There are people of every economic status who suffer from poverty of health or spirit who are also in dire need of assistance. Lack of money isn't the only thing which makes us poor, just as abundance of money isn't the only thing which makes us rich.

Even in these tough economic times, there are a great many gifts we may possess which can be shared with those less fortunate: gifts such as time, talent or compassion. Most of us have something to offer, even if it is only a few moments of conversation with a lonely neighbor. We can all do a lot more than we give ourselves credit for.

I don't mean to come across as Santa's Bummer Elf or the Ghost of



GARY BELANGER

Christmas Depressant, and I'm not going to dump a sleighful of guilt down your chimney. This is just a reminder, mostly to myself, to work on the "Peace on Earth, goodwill towards men" part of the business, even though that concept seems all but impossible after a December Saturday at the mall. These words must have been written before the invention of the pre-Christmas clearance sale.

This year I am hopeful of offering more than my good intentions. I am hopeful of counting among my blessings the knowledge that I have done or said something to ease somebody's trouble. Most of all, I am hopeful that if I hear myself saying, "I've got enough to do just to take care of my own," I'll remember who that includes.

This year, when the time comes for you to decide what you can give, don't just look in your pocket for some spare change or in your pantry for a spare can of Spam. Look in your appointment book for some spare time, and into your heart for some compassion and do what you can. Whatever you give will pay you great dividends.

After that, if you've still got an extra 500 grand lying around, and you decide to go for the solid chocolate Rolls, I just want you to know one thing. I've got dibs on the hood ornament.

Gary Belanger is a Redford Township resident and school board trustee. His column appears periodically. To reach Belanger from a touch tone phone, call 953-2047 mailbox number 1850.

Students exhibit creative writing

Some of the excuses we teachers receive for student absences are a riot. We share a few with you.

In a holiday spirit, it's a good time to lighten up a bit so here are a couple of your absentee notes from kids that I had on file.

■ Please excuse John for being absent Jan. 30, 31, 32 and dd.

■ Chris was absent because he had an acre in his side.

■ Joe was absent yesterday because he had a stomach.

■ Please excuse Joey Friday. He had loose vowels.

■ Mary could not go to school because she was bothered by very loose veins.

■ John was absent because he has two teeth taken out of his face.

■ My son is under doctor's care and should not take PHYS. ED. Please excuse him.

■ Carl was hit yesterday playing football. He was hurt in the growing part.



DOE DOYLE

■ Please excuse Joyce from Jim today. She is administrating.

■ Ralph was absent yesterday because of a sore tout.

■ Please excuse Blache's absence yesterday. She fell out of a tree and misplaced her hip.

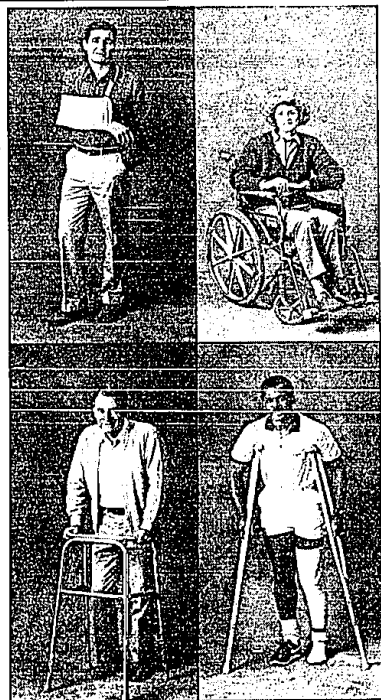
■ Please excuse Wayne for being out yesterday. He had the fuel.

■ Mark was kept home yesterday because he had a loose system.

Needless to say, excuses of this nature are usually written by the children, the future of our nation. As a teacher I received my share of creative written excuse masterpieces. How, as a teacher and a principal, I used to "love" seeing them blush and squirm when I would read the note back to them in a skeptical tone and with a smile on my face.

And, because most kids are good people, the majority would live up to their folly once I suggested a phone call to their parents to verify the authenticity of their "illness."

James "Doe" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm. To leave a message for him from a touch tone phone, please call 953-2047 mailbox 1856.



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National Association for Hospital Development

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