Broadway Bill:

tant. in New

man show, mugs for the camera outside the theater on Broadway.

POINTS OF VIEW

Trip to see Letterman makes Top 10 list

hat is it about television that seems so magical even to people who have watched it all their lives?

their lives?
That was the rhetorical question I asked after traveling some 1,300 miles in a two-day period. . . all for the privilege of spending a lot of money, fighting some of the world's worst traffic, in a city where seemingly everybody smokes and walks against the light in an obvious death wish . . . all to be an audience member of the "Late Show with David Letterman."
My wife, Susan, meant to surprise

audience member of the "Late Show with David Letterman."

My wife, Susan, meant to surprise me (and she didl) by ordering the tickets so that we could see the show on a Friday night as part of a weekend in New York City, Maybe we'd go to the museums, stroll through Central Park and see the sights while we were at it.

The tickets were for a Wednesday, OK, we'll get a cheap flight in one day with the round trip coming back the next. It would be sort of an adventure. But finding a cheap, round-trip air ticket to New York that didn't go through Atlanta, Chicago and some lesser-known hubs was more than an adventure. But we didn't hesitate.

"We'll just have to drive," we agreed.

So there we were, in the middle of the night, fending off semis with three trailers that looked like buildings moving in excess of 70 mph. And we in our little Honda Civic.

Then there were those rest stops. Ah, it's easy to see how they can charge for the privilege of driving on that storied stretch of road.

Big town traffic

Big town traffic

Big town traffic Undaunted, we crossed over into Manhattan on the George Washington Bridge in late morning and found a different sort of adventure awaiting us—driving in New York City.

As we drove on a three-lane, one-way street (56th) toward Park Avenue and our hotel, we suddenly realized why at least two out of three cars on the island were large aggressive cabs with drivers who halled from countries where the first person on the goat path has the right of way.

right of way.

"Sue, I think that truck in the mid-die of the street is parked," I'd offer.

"No, it can't be," she'd reply, it was.
In fact, delivery trucks, cars, vans and cabs park in any lane at any time.

And if someone protests, the answer is swift and predictable — an extended middle finger and an unmistakable directive. How kind to say it and sign it, just in case the person on the other end was hearing, or sight-impaired. Although tired after our night of driving (we took turns nappling), we were happy to get to our room at the Waldorf Astoria and get a shower. After a walk in the mild (mid-70s) June day through Central Park, up Park Avenue and down Madison, we were ready to get our seating assign-And if someone protests, the answer is

were ready to get our scating assignments for the show, which is taped at 5:30 p.m.

Mujibur's on duty

Mujibur's on duty
But while we were in the neighborhood, we decided to check out the Helio Deli, to see if Rupert was around. If you've seen David Letterman often enough, you become familiar with his celebrated neighbors. No Rupert. So it was on to K&L's Rock America Inc., better known as the souvenir shop run by Dave's sometimes sidekicks Mujibur and Sirajul.

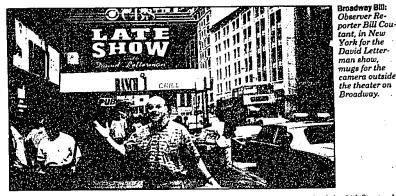
The celebrated pair from Bangladsh are part of the "Late Show" family. And as luck would have it, Mujibur was on hand to talk about the show, shake my hand and then, as we were perusing the T-shirts, encourage me toget my ticket assignment.

"You can come back later," he said, motioning us to the theater. Mujibur was nice as pie, seemingly enjoying his celebrity status — as well as the financial rewards that come with that fame. After getting a line number we came back at 4 p.m. to line up for the show. That's when I discovered that few David Letterman fans who have come this far are casual.

"He rarely has good guests on

far are casual.

"He rarely has good guests on Wednesday," assured Brian, a Dave



fan from Philadelphia who was just be-hind us.

fan from Philadelphia who was just behind us.

In fact Brian seemed to know the exact time at which the second guest appears, who all the cameramen were and details that I would never have thought to ask about. Mercifully, we were ushered in the Ed Sullivan Theater.

The theater is smaller than it appears to be on TV, with only room enough for about 420 audience members.

But once you're inside the theater, the atmosphere is energized. The low-numbered tickets mean you sit closer to the stage. For many, this means to the stage. For many, this means their face on camera, or in rare in-stances, 15 seconds of fame if Dave talks to them. Today, the trick of wear-ing a goofy hat to get on camera didn't work, but the old reliable Bail State sweat shirts did.

'Warm' reception

'Warm' reception
Dave comes out for about two minutes before the show and talks to the
audience. With the wind chill in the
theater at about 50 degrees, the audience is happy to appliand to keep warAnd the band? Paul Shaffer, Anton

and the gang really rock the place, especially, it seems, during the breaks as Dave is surrounded by a producer, di-

rector and other folks to discuss I-don't-know-what.
We attended the June 21 show in which Dave handed out frozen pork treats — "hamsickles" — and beach balls to kick off the summer.
But during the interviews, audience members see no more of Dave than viewers at home, because sound, light, camera equipment and technicians surround Dave.
Other than that, the mood is strictly

amera equipment and technicians surround Dave.

Other than that, the mood is strictly festive. And after Tony Bennett ended the show with an upbeat song, the audience went out singing, with beach balls and hamsickles in hand.

It was early.

So off we trudged, looking like the American Gothic farm couple beamed down to the crowd.

We had thought we'd take a cab after the Letterman taping to the Empire State Building. But while we had been stuck in traffic earlier, I noticed the price for a cab ride, including "20 cents per minute while stopped," and "20 cents per minute while stopped," and "20 cents per minute while traffic is slow." I'm no math whit, but the meaning was unmistakable.

"Let's walk."

Aw, no hamsickles

For the first and last time in New York City, we found few people crowd-

ing us as we headed to 34th Street at the building made more famous in "King Kong."

After a word and the street of the street o

After a wonderful supper in a great

After a wonderful supper in a great Italian restaurant near our hotel, we took in our show—six hours later—right after Bernie Smilovitz, formerly of Detroit TV fame, delivered the Devilish hockey news (Ugh!).
If you looked carefully, you might have seen someone in a Western Michigan sweat shirt (I didn't have anything with Grand Rapids—site of the home office) groping toward the hamsickles or the camera.

Next morning we decided to end any hope of eliminating our credit card balance by ordering room service breakfast.

Now came the decision. We could Now came the decision. We could leave now and arrive home by about midnight, regretting forever that we had not seen much during our brief atay. Or, we could see the Green Lady (Statue of Liberty) and Ellis Island and wind up tired at work the next day. Sorry, boss, but what could I do?

It cost a lot, those free tickets to David Letterman. But for a couple of out-of-towners, it made our Top 10 list of places to visit.

Bill Coutant, a Farmington resident, is a reporter for the Farmington Observer.

If theocratic babble reigns, value of diplomas will suffer

et's put the public schools debate into

et a put the public school release in the same perspective:

In 1994 we argued over money. Voters approved a cut in achool property taxes and an increase in the sales tax. Essentially, the state took over fiscal responsibility, as the Michigan Constitution says it should. More school districts than we can imagine were saved from backwinger.

bankruptcy. In 1995 we're debating what's taught and to In 1950 we're decading what a tagent into whose standards. It's easier to grasp the ideas if we put names on them. Let's take the two most visible members of the State Board of Educa-

tion:
First, Dorothy Beardmore, R-Rochester, The tall, white-haired lady served on her local school board, then the Oakland Intermed Board, and is in her second term on the State

Board, and is in her second term on the State Board. She's moderate to conservative. With two colleagues, Beardmore in the mid-1980s began prodding the board to do what it was supposed to do for three-quarters of a century. Lead, supervise, plan and coordinate all public sducation. The Beardmore team pushed for new testing standards, state-endorsed diplomas, curriculum goals (not bureaucratic credit requirements), and so on. They got a lot of their ideas from job providers in industry, utilities, finance and commerce.

Out of nowhere, Beardmore was challenged in the 1992 GOP state convention by the old Pat Robertson crew and harely survived. The Robertson Religious Right types are death on state

Robertson crew and barely survived. The Robertson Religious Right types are death on state standards, curriculum goals (particularly genetics and evolution), teamwork and analytical thinking. Their thing is obedience to parnnts—and parental following of the local preacher.

Second, W. Clark Durant, R. Grosse Points. Once famed for bow ties and suspenders, Durant is a lawyer who places ideology over facts. His post-school education superience is confined to some work for Hilladale College, a hotbed of abolitionism in the 19th Century, now known chiefly for its accentric, anti-faderal post-school work at sither the local, intermediate or community college level prior to being elected to the State Board. the State Board.

the State Board.
Durant was a Jack Kemp type in 1988, not a
Robertson Bible-thumper. But the badly outnumbered Kemples got into the political bed
with the Robertson folks to block George
Bush's nomination. Durant isn't a Raligious
Right type himself though he has a lot in com-



mon with the RR.

mon with the RR.
Durant's father, Dick, was once a John Bircher and a frequent boil on the backside of Gov.
William G. Milliken, the moderate gentleman who led the state 14 years. There are those who suggest Clark Durant is racist or anti-Semitic. I

suggest Clark Durant is racted or anti-semitic. a
do not share that suspicion.
In the latest State Board of Education machinations, Durant is playing to the Yahoos. His
ideas boil down to allowing school buildings to
opt out of school district governance and allowing districts to go "home rule" and be rid of
state tests, curricula goals, democratic elections
with the other accomplements that the Beland all the other encumbrances that the Relgious Rights finds so intolerable. Of course, the new systems would continue to get state money.

The Religious Right, though relatively suc-The Religious Fight, and stoods to the Republican Party, isn't doing par-ticularly well in its effort to take over school boards. The more it is exposed, the weirder it

boards. The more it is exposed, the weirder it looks to mainstream voters.

But with "home rule" and the opt-out features, one or two congregations could get hold of school buildings and money and do their thing — rote learning, mandatory voluntary school prayer, religious creationism, and so on. What Durant is pushing for is to let the fundamentalists do their thing without bothering to look a bunch of court battles. Most reader of this newspaper are unlikely to buy into such

to lose a runch of count within newspaper are unlikely to buy into such theoretic babble.

Unfortunately, if he succeeds and some back

Unfortunately, it is success and some schooling, it will cheapen the value of high school diplomas for all the other young Americans.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional conts. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext 1881.

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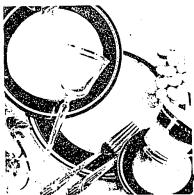
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