

Rouge may again offer fun, adventure for youth

Changing currents

When I was a youngster growing up in Southfield, the physical landscape was much different from the concrete jungle of today. I grew up on 10 1/2 Mile Road, now Civic Center Drive, between Telegraph and Laher.

In the late 1960s, my street was a dirt road with large old houses set on four-acre lots.

"Behind the houses on the north side, and stretching all the way to what is now the I-590 service drive, was a great expanse of fields, woods, streams and ponds — a perfect place for kids to spend hours exploring, building tree forts and playing simulated war games."

Another favorite play spot back then was the Rouge River, which near my neighborhood wound its way along Telegraph Road, feeding the streams and ponds to the east and flowing to heaven knows where to the west after crossing Telegraph.

The "Rouge" offered year-round fun for our gang.

In the winter it provided a great ice

skating track; with the spring floods came a swollen, river perfect for float trips in homemade Huck Finn-like rafts; and summer and fall saw lots of fishing and swimming.

And the Telegraph and Civic Center overpasses provided perfect hunting grounds for my next-door neighbor Robby Cornacchini's raids on pigeon nests to supplement his coop.

Now, before you think I'm crazy, let's remember we are talking nearly 30 years ago here, and even if the Rouge pollution horror stories were around then — which I don't remember them being — we were just a bunch of kids.

We didn't care about pollution or anything else; we were just looking for ways to pass the time.

Time has a way of blurring one's memory, but I still remember where the best fishing spots were, as well as our favorite swimming hole.

During high-water periods, we used to jump off the Civic Center bridge into the water below, and I am happy to report that not a single serious injury was recorded during these leaps of faith (foolishness?).

You could catch fish in most stretches of the river, usually a combination of



JOE BAUMAN

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suckers, small carp and some sunfish. But the really big fish hid out in shady spots caused by big tree branches hanging over the river, and the previously mentioned bridge overpasses.

Which brings me to a favorite fish story. I was fishing one day with my brothers and some friends, and had caught out at the Telegraph overpass while the rest of the gang searched for fish further down shore.

I was casting a big worm into the dark reaches of water flowing under the bridge and letting the current carry the bait to what I hoped was a lunker waiting in ambush.

I hadn't had a single bite and was ready to give up when I noticed that my line had stopped dead in the water.

Thinking I had snagged a rock I gave it a slight tug.

Instead of flowing back downstream, my line started heading upstream and I knew at once that I had hooked one of those lunkers.

Well, the fight with the mighty carp was long and intense. It would pull out line, and I would reel it back in. After what seemed like hours, I finally fought the beast to a spot directly below my feet.

Standing on a rather high bank, I was faced with the dilemma of trying to lift the monster out of the water and up the bank.

With no help around, the task proved impossible. Halfway up the bank, our eyes met, the fish gave a shake, and the line snapped, plopping the 10-pound beauty back into the river.

No one else saw that fish, but I will never forget it. And it saddens me every time I drive down my old street that almost nothing of my childhood remains.

The houses have given way to a sea of apartment buildings, and the fields and ponds I so dearly loved were filled in and now support huge office buildings.

But one thing does remain. And who knows, if efforts like the Rouge Rescue and pollution controls are successful, maybe one day other kids will have a chance to share some of the good times that I enjoyed on the river.

And there may even be another giant carp lurking under that bridge.

Joe Bauman is editor of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Eccentric who spent the first 18 years of his life in Southfield.

Performance not basis for excessive executive compensation

Here's a pop quiz to see if you can think like a business mogul. Pretend you're a corporate director serving on the salary and compensation committee.

Corp. A reported a 13 percent sales increase, hiked the dividend 12 percent to 19 cents a share, opened 259 new stores and added 53,000 jobs last year.

Corp. B reported a 5.8 percent sales increase, lost 23 cents a share, discontinued the dividend, closed 214 "underperforming" stores, sold off four entire subsidiaries, and either hid or didn't report employment in 44 pages of grey type in its annual report. Jobs probably were cut.

One chief executive got a salary of \$660,300 plus a \$1 million bonus.

The other chief executive got a salary of \$1 million but no bonus.

Question: Which company paid the \$1 million bonus? Remember, you are to think like a corporate mogul, not a working-class peon.

Answer: Corp. B, with the shrinking assets and red ink, paid its CEO the \$1 million bonus on top of his salary.

Corp. B is Kmart, the troubled Troy-based merchandiser. The CEO is Floyd Hall, who has been on board since last June after Joseph Antonini left the dust.

The poor performance figures are not the concoction of a union pinkie or Mother Jones magazine. Hall's compensation is listed on page seven of Kmart's proxy statement. (The profitable firm, incidentally, is Wal-Mart, which lists CEO David Glass' compensation on page 3 of its proxy statement.)

In fairness to Hall, let it be pointed out he didn't trundle off with \$1 million cash. He voluntarily elected to use 100 percent of this cash bonus to purchase restricted shares of company common stock ...

Recall that Kmart stock, which traded in the \$20s a few years back, bottomed out at \$6 last year. The day this column was composed, it traded at \$10.

But Kmart's proxy statement (pg. 11) also tells us that Hall got "an effective 20 percent discount under the Company's Management Stock Purchase Plan." In other words, the stock Hall acquired in the \$6 ballpark has doubled in price. He may not peddle it for two



TIM RICHARD

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more years.

The page seven salary chart says Hall's base salary was \$660,300. Correction: He worked only part of 1995 for Kmart. On page 11, we find his annual base salary is \$1 million. The proxy statement reveals him to be a warm-hearted soul: "At his request, Mr. Hall did not receive a salary increase for fiscal 1996."

Let us not ignore Hall's team: Ron Floto, EVP, \$103,280 bonus; Marv Rich, another EVP, \$103,280 bonus; Tom Watkins, senior VP, \$85,628 bonus; Don Keeble, still another EVP, \$74,620; plus stock options.

I was taught that a bonus is extra payment for a good performance. Kmart has bottomed out, but has yet to recover. Moreover, Hall's team got bonuses for running a smaller enterprise than the one from which Antonini was ejected.

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Many left-wing writers see the issue as "people versus profits." Not so. The shared enemies of both stockholders and workers are executives who milk the corporation for unearned bonuses.

The Kmart board has a mushily-worded alibi for its generosity to the top of the heap (proxy, page 11): "In the circumstance of hiring new executive officers during the past year — in order to compete in the marketplace for executive talent — initial compensation was of necessity less performance based than executive officer compensation has been on an on-going basis."

Well, Kmart's annual shareholders meeting is coming up at 10 a.m. Tuesday, May 21, not in Troy but a new setting — the Fisher Theater, 3001 West Grand Blvd., Detroit. It should be quite a show.

Anyone who thinks Sam Donaldson and Mike Wallace are savage inquisitors never has been to a stockholder meeting — particularly Kmart's.

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

Families responsible for child behavior, but law only a tool

Just to get the wheels turning, here's a selection of quotes about last week's conviction of Anthony and Susan Provenzano for violating the St. Clair Shores parental responsibility ordinance after their son, Alex, got into repeated trouble with the law:

"We did the best we could. We taught him right from wrong from the day he was born. There's only so much you can do. Once they are outside the home, they are really making decisions on their own." — Susan Provenzano.

"You don't ask your son to go (into counseling, which Alex had refused to do). You tell him what he's going to do." — An unidentified juror.

"Should every act that a child does become part of the parent's responsibility? I don't know if it sends fear into the heart of every parent that their neighbor will be watching." — Jim Murphy, village manager in Holly, which is considering an ordinance.

"We spend an awful lot closing the door after the horse is gone. I think anything that puts the family on notice about responsibilities of parenthood is a positive thing." — Gov. John Engler.

If your house is anything like mine, parental responsibility has been a hot topic around the kitchen table.

My wife, Kathy, is pretty strict about discipline, but she feels passing laws forcing parents to be responsible for their kids' behavior is, well, socialist. "It's just another way for the government to stick its nose into places where it has no business," she said, putting her coffee mug down firmly.

Not only that, but "how in the world are they going to enforce ordinances like that? Lots of kids get into trouble, and who's going to decide which particular parents to prosecute?" she says. Indeed, vagueness of the St. Clair Shores ordinance may well be the basis for appeals, according to Howard Simon, director of the American Civil Liberties Union.

As I sat mulling the matter, it occurred to me that what really has happened over the past 30 years or so is a significant shift in the definition of the American family.

In the old days (whenver that was), the traditional family was regarded as the basic module of social behavior. Sins or offenses committed by one family member were regarded as the responsibility of the entire unit. This old doctrine led to demands for family vengeance, feuds between families that lasted for generations. And it defined people more as family members than as independent individuals.

But beginning in the 1960s, the idea grew and flourished that members of a family should be defined as individuals, fundamentally autonomous and therefore ultimately responsible for their own behavior. In this definition of a person, membership in a family was secondary to one's own individuality.



PHILIP POWER

"Will parental responsibility ordinances have much weight in the mind of a bad kid like Alex Provenzano? I doubt it very much. But properly written and applied with care, will they provide parents and police with a tool of last resort to suggest that people are, at the end of the day, family members and that their behavior needs to be affected by the family as a whole? I believe they will."

I suspect that in a subtle way, this shift in the relative conception of individuals in relation to families has undergirded the breakdown of the traditional family. And it is this breakdown that lies behind the concern for "family values" and is expressed today in fascination with parental responsibility ordinances.

Certainly, the rise in juvenile crime is alarming. In Oakland County, for example, violent juvenile crime jumped 266 percent over the past 12 years, and national estimates suggest an increase of 100,000 violent juvenile offenders over the next decade.

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Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

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