

POINTS OF VIEW

Buying craze pushes fad to sorry limits

*Our children are to be loved,
They care for us, so give lots of hugs.
Make them feel secure and true,
Remember, we're the adults, me and you.
—Adaptation of Beanie Baby poem*

It was a simple question and she didn't expect to get her head bitten off. My sister's coming to visit and she wants to bring a gift for her 2-year-old great-niece, who incidentally happens to be my granddaughter.

"How about a Beanie Baby?" she innocently asked. "No," I said emphatically. And this from someone who for Valentine's Day wrote a positive column on the Beanie Baby fad.

"Clearly, I was seduced by the phenomenon, including watching hordes of parents, grand-parents, children and adult collectors stalk the newly-stocked shelves of local stores.

"What I saw seemed to be done with a sense of fun. But more recent signs indicate that it is getting out of line. Because the lure of those soft, cuddly Beanie Babies, whose heart-shaped messages speak of love, are touching off something else in adults.

"We all read about the huge traffic jams that occurred at McDonald's franchises in some of our communities when they introduced miniature Beanie Babies as a feature of their kids' Happy Meals.

"In Troy, police had their hands full. 'The situation became very serious,' said Sgt. Mike Kerr, 'as parents were parking on the other side of the road and herding their little children across five lanes of Rochester Road traffic. The potential was there for a serious accident. It was just crazy.'

"Last week, in the Troy Eccentric a mom wrote with humor of her experience, of perusing a gift card shop over to open up his stock of Beanie Babies just to her. To his credit, he was holding a new shipment hostage until children were out of school, because he wanted to make sure they weren't all bought up by adults in the meantime.

"Although these are for her children, ages 7, 3 and 15 months, she writes: 'I cannot carry the Beanie Babies through the store. I must



JUDITH DONER BERNE

pay for them at the front register then drive around to the back delivery door. 'Please don't tell anyone, I want to make sure that only kids get these,' the store owner says, as he hands them over. 'I pledge not to tell, then boldly ask if he'll sell me three tomorrow,' she writes.

"We all want to do for our kids. But aren't they also watching how we do it? And, somehow the quest for Beanie Babies has altered judgments.

"As sad as it may seem, a good deal of parenting is more about the parents' needs than about their children's," says Mary Rattner Nave, a psychologist with Counseling Associates of Southfield.

Unlike the proprietor of the above-mentioned gift and card store, a Farmington Hills gift and card store owner took advantage of the mania. A store flier offered that if customers bought \$5 to \$9.99 worth of merchandise, they could purchase one Beanie Baby at the regular price. If they spent \$10 more, they could buy two Beanie Babies and so on.

Enter Judy Davids of Royal Oak who bought cards and wrapping paper for \$16 to purchase two Beanie Babies to add to her collection of 70. She later had second thoughts about being forced to pay for merchandise she really didn't need to buy the Beanie Babies at the regular price.

The State Attorney General's Office says it is a violation of state and federal antitrust laws. Spokesman Chris DeWitt said that a store could offer the item free or at a discount, but not merely contingent on buying another product.

"When I left there (the store), I realized I finally crossed the line in my Beanie Baby mania," Davids said, to her credit.

Clearly, some of the rest of us need to get our priorities in order — me and you.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can comment on this column by calling (313)953-2047, Ext. 1997.

LETTERS

'Pippin' sparks thought, kudos

My 8-year-old son Steven and I, along with my parents, saw "Pippin" at North Farmington High School on Friday, April 18. Prior to seeing the play, my son and I had been listening to the music which we both really enjoyed. We saw the poster advertising the play and immediately called about getting tickets. I asked about the PG-13 rating, and after thinking about my son's maturity, decided to go see it. Both he and I were very impressed by the students' acting, singing and professionalism in putting on this play. He understood about this young man's search for something meaningful for his life. It was very thought provoking and brought about some serious and very fruitful discussions between us. All the situations presented in this play are facts of life, including sex, and are subjects that need to be faced, not denied or ignored. I am so happy that you were able to bring this play into a high school where students are at a point in their lives where they will be pondering these difficult issues. If this play opens up dialogue or gets people to think, I'm all for it. My son wanted to go back on Saturday, but we already had other plans, otherwise I would have taken him. I applaud everyone involved.

Sharon Betel
Farmington Hills

done in the guise of supporting the arts.

Linda Kennedy
Farmington Hills

248 is only the beginning

Too many local homes and businesses have had to tolerate three area codes and two zip codes in less than three years because certain people at the telephone company and the post office are reacting when they should be planning.

The 248 area code change by no means will be the end of the nonsense. Los Angeles now has nine area codes (yes nine!) and there are contingency plans for more. Phone company gurus are also advancing four digit area codes and eight digit telephone numbers as "the most practical solution" to their problem. Always "more numbers." Like a mantra!

All of this is a little much for those in the population who can remember the good old pre-1947 days of no area codes. Not long before that there were no dial phones, a pleasant voice greeted you with "Number please," information was free, and there were no monthly phone bills at millions of homes that had nickel pay phones.

Many of the current problems are caused by "dedicated" lines for beepers, cell phones, fax machines, modems, gabby teen-agers, and telephone marketing nuisances, although not necessarily in that order.

For the inevitable next round of changes, the mental giants at Ma Bell might consider using one meaningful suffix instead of more glibberish prefixes, and then make an attempt to reduce the number of different area codes. Wouldn't it be convenient to have one area code for the Detroit metro area and another code for the rest of Michigan? Likewise for the Chicago, L.A., Boston and other metro areas.

There's no reason at all why a person's only telephone number couldn't be followed by some meaningful letter, for example: H (4) for the home telephone, W (9) for workplace phone, F (3) for fax machine, V (8) for vehicle phone, P (7) for pager, C (2) for cellular telephone, K (6) for kid's phone, and N (6) for nanny's phone or some other logical arrangement.

Is it absolutely necessary to have 10 or 12 digit number "codes" to accomplish a domestic connection or forward a simple message when something else like "englerjohn@aol.com" works so well locally or even internationally in another medium?

Richard Rosenbaum,
Birmingham

Sexual content inappropriate

I'd like to respond to your May 1 article and editorial re: the recent "Pippin" production at North Farmington High School.

First, the article stated that Mr. Cobb also oversaw the production of "Pippin" 14 years ago at the same school. Well? One naturally wonders how this year's production differed from the earlier one. I think this question still needs to be answered.

Secondly, I seriously take issue with your editorial that implied that criticism of the play was "an example of how the arts can be attacked." I applaud Mr. Thill's April 24 letter! He had the guts to state publicly what many of us think: that the sexual content of the play was inappropriate for a high school stage.

Finally, don't mistake the few complaints received as a sign acceptance. The majority of people I have talked to about this do not want to see our high schools doing plays with sexual (or violent) content that warrants a PG-13 (or any other) rating. Kids are growing up too quickly already in today's society, and having high school kids simulate sexual intercourse on stage is yet another sad example of this.

I hope this is not what our community con-

Battles brew after Engler is driven to concrete action

You've really got to hand it to Gov. "Pothole" John Engler.

After months and months of getting pounded on the state of Michigan's roads, the governor finally came up with a package of tax increases and structural reforms coherent enough to be called "bold" and "creative" by his apologetic and a betrayal of his tax-cutting record by his critics. The governor's plan would:

- Raise \$700 million in new money for road repair and construction, including a four-cents a gallon increase in the fuel tax and continued pressure on Washington to jigger the formula for distributing federal road money in Michigan's favor.

- Change the system of governance for Michigan road work by putting some 23,000 miles of major local roads under state governance rather than counties and cities. The idea is to create economies of scale and to force county road commissions to let road repair contracts by competitive bids.

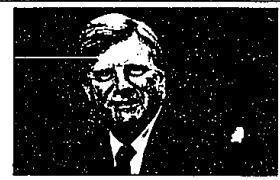
- Introduce choice into the Michigan auto insurance market. Insurance would still pay for actual damages and medical costs from accidents, but drivers could choose whether to buy additional coverage for intangible costs such as "pain and suffering." Best estimates are that such skinned back insurance coverage would save an average of \$110 a year per policy holder.

That Engler would have to come up with something on roads became inevitable the day Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson infuriated the governor by posing for news photographers standing in a manhole and holding a sign taunting his fellow Republican: "Governor, how about this pothole."

It's an axiom that politicians have plenty of freedom to maneuver when the issues at hand are complicated and abstract enough to glaze the eyes of an average voter. But the corollary is that when the issues get simple and concrete — hitting a big pothole every time you drive home from work being the instant example — any politician worth his salt had better start hearing down.

The governor knows this at the very core of his being. And whether or not he decides to run for a third term, he most certainly does not want to go down in Michigan history as "Pothole John," the governor who wouldn't do anything about the road.

I'd guess now that the very thing that has



PHILIP POWER

terrorized the political class in this state for months — a tax increase! — will likely be overshadowed by the fights over the other components of the governor's proposal. Two fights are obvious, and a third one should be.

Counties and cities are going to scream bloody murder about the prospect of losing local control over roads and repairs. Oakland County's Patterson, for one, believes the governor wants to abolish county road commissions and leave control of all road spending in the hands of Lansing bureaucrats. As of now, I'm inclined to agree with him.

"Auto choice" insurance will, of course, be hated by the trial lawyers, who benefit primarily from the present system, which virtually invites expensive litigation. There is now a fair amount of evidence that as much as half of pain-and-suffering awards go to lawyers on both sides. Taking away some incentives to sue and saving on insurance bills ought to make any red-blooded Lansing lawmaker drool, but we shall see.

The fight that ought to take place has to do with the shamefully high load limits on trucks operating on Michigan roads. Most engineers testify it is the pounding administered by the heavily laden 18-wheelers that really has done in our roads.

The governor finessed this topic last week with a one-liner about preferring not to talk about weight limits, but if he really wants to do something (ahem) concrete to keep our roads in good repair he ought to (ahem) scale this public policy issue.

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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