

Ex-New Christy Minstrel helps Grace students find their 'voice'

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Curtis Coleman once was a member in the late 1970s version of the folk group, The New Christy Minstrels. In the late 1990s, he's a musical minstrel with a mission.

Coleman, and his 8-year-old stepson Max, last week visited William Grace and Lanigan elementary schools in the Farmington district. The Danny Bonaduce look-alike was on go—complete with his acoustic guitar, cassette tape player and armful of self-penned tunes, which he wrote to help children learn to think for themselves.

By the end of his one-hour concert at Grace last Monday, Coleman had teachers acting like little kids at the front of the gymnasium with ridiculous dance steps during a song about bike safety. And he had little kids all geared up to act like adults, with the knowledge they do have a "voice" and a rightful place in society.

And yes, there was a version of one of The New Christy Minstrel's hit songs, "This Land is Your Land," though it was reworked as "from Honolulu to the New York Islands."

Before the assembly, Coleman set up his microphone and discussed why he travels across time zones to sing "What's Mine is Mine and What's Yours is Yours," "Riding My Bike," "I Said No to Drugs" and "Stop, Drop and Roll."

During 1996-97, he visited 480 schools in the United States.

"We're going to teach these kids through music," he said, "which is a wonderful medium to teach about anything."

"These songs are about fire safety, bicycle safety, what to do when strangers come up to you, saying no to drugs, and most importantly, finding their own voice."

Right from the time the children filed into the William Grace gymnasium and sat cross-legged on the floor, Coleman had their undivided attention.

Working the crowd

"I want you, without making a single sound, to raise your hand if you have a bike at school?"

Many in the young audience raise their hands.

"Cool! How about a smoke detector at home?"

More hands go up.

"Awesome!"

Then, musically strumming and interacting throughout, he sang his first song, "America (the Beautiful)," following it with a question about the meaning of the Bill of Rights.

"Each and every one of us has a right to be here in America. Right? And because of that, that means one very important thing—every one of us has a voice."

Repeat after me, I have a voice. We're going to celebrate that today."

For his number about fire safety, called "Stop, Drop and Roll," Coleman enlisted a student named Nadine to come up and help. But first, he set up a scenario.

"You're in your house and you're very scared," Coleman said. "You smell smoke, and into the house comes a great big person, breathing heavily into a mask."

Coleman inhales and exhales into his microphone.

"Who is it? . . . It's a firefighter. And what do you do when your clothes are on fire? You stop (he holds his hands up, palms outward), drop (he pushes the palms toward the floor) and roll (he twirls his hands)."

Nadine then assisted Coleman with his fire prevention song.

When the audience yelled "Stop," she stood absolutely still. The word "Drop" prompted her to fall to the floor. When everybody shouted "Roll," she did just that.

But the singer noticed one thing that Nadine should have done, but didn't do. She didn't cover her face.

"There are three reasons why: So you don't breathe smoke; so you don't burn your face; and so you don't break your nose while you're rolling around on the floor."

The last reason prompted some laughter out of the audience.

Special request

But Coleman quickly changed the mood, asking children to sit quietly while he performed his next song, "What's Mine is Mine and What's Yours is Yours."

The song about helping kids avoid sexual abuse was written to fulfill a request made by a 9-year-old girl who saw Coleman's program in Houston.

"Before the show, Jennifer came up to me, put out her

hand and said, 'Hi, I'm Jennifer. I thought it was cool,' he said. 'But after the show, she was crying. I asked her why and she said, 'There's someone who likes to play games with me that I don't like to play.'"

Jennifer didn't know what to do. But Coleman told her he'd write a song to help her find the answer. He now sings it at every concert.

Following are some of the lyrics.

"You can say no, you have the right. . . You should just run away as fast as you can and tell someone."

If someone tries to do you wrong, you don't have to play along. Just remember to sing this song."

Coleman concluded his sprightly performance with "Riding My Bike" and "I Said No to Drugs."

Prior to singing "Riding My Bike," Coleman noted that 68 percent of American kids do not own a bike helmet and that head injuries are the top cause of death and injury for elementary school age children.

He implored the kids who "really need" a helmet to nicely ask their parents for one.

"If your mom or dad doesn't get you a new helmet within one week after asking them very nicely, I have a way for you to get one very fast. . . ."

"Ask your grandma or grandpa and they'll get it like. . . that!" Coleman said while snapping his fingers.

A challenge

For "I Said No to Drugs," Coleman asked students to help sing the song and even challenged them to outperform youngsters at the last school he was at, in another Oakland County district.

Before the assembly ended, Coleman summed up the assembly message with an impromptu verse.

"I have a voice, and when I use my voice I'm very powerful. As a matter of fact, I'm just as big as I think I am."

Principal Katy Hill said Coleman's appearance was scheduled in conjunction with Sober October, and to reinforce the "drug-free message."

The concert was funded by Drug Free Schools, a federal grant program that takes money from drug busts for prevention purposes.



Be safe: Richard Niemisto, Hills assistant police chief, talks to seniors about crime at the William Costick Center.

Seniors join police academy

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Seniors are learning about the how-tos and the who-dunnits courtesy of the Farmington Hills police.

The department and the city's Senior Adult Center are sponsoring a new senior police academy, which meets 1 p.m. Wednesdays through the month at the William Costick Center. The last program is Oct. 25.

Attendees have been getting the low-down from officers on crime prevention tips to what's involved in preserving a crime scene. The academy will conclude with a tour and the participants being honored at a ceremony.

At a recent meeting, Sgt. Darrell Krause provided the facts on an arson/murder and the seniors had to try to solve the crime.

"We were asked why the man (the suspect) came back to the house 10 minutes later after the fire started and nobody got it right," said Mary Stevens, who attends the sessions with her husband, James.

Hills police Assistant Chief

Richard Niemisto offered insight on the department's history at the first program and crime prevention Officer Bonnie Unruh provided advice on how to thwart burglars during another session.

"We live in Farmington Hills and we thought it was very informative," Mary Stevens said. "Anything we can do to add to our own safety is good."

Seniors get a better insight into how the department operates, which involves more than patrolling streets, Hills police said. The department also sponsors Police and Seniors Together (PAST), which pairs officers with older people who are isolated.

Senior Police Academy is one of 40 community programs offered by the department, which received first place from the Michigan Municipal League for such efforts.

"The seniors are very important to us," said Bill Dwyer, Farmington Hills police chief. "This just increases our opportunities to assist seniors in the community and provide them with valuable information."

OBITUARIES

MARY CAROLINE GREGORY
Mary Caroline Gregory, 80, died Oct. 20, 1997.

Formerly of Farmington, Mrs. Gregory is survived by son, Michael; daughter, Suzanne; sister, Theresa; and granddaughter, Gwynne.

Funeral services were held in Florida.

WARREN M. "WHITEY" WILHELM
Warren M. "Whitey" Wilhelm, 85, died Oct. 22 at his home in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. He was formerly of Farmington.

Mr. Wilhelm was employed by the city of Riviera Beach in the purchasing department and became chief steward for the

International Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers Union which he organized in 1975. He was a Mason and member of the Farmington Lodge No. 161, F&AM.

He is survived by daughters, Jane Jefferson of Reston, Va., and Lois Appleby of Vero Beach, Fla.; and granddaughter, Beth Winters of Gaithersburg, Md.

A Masonic service was held Oct. 25 at the Grand Lawn Cemetery Chapel in Detroit.

Arrangements made by Thayer Rock Funeral Home in Farmington. Memorial contributions can be made to the Visiting Nurse Association, 560 Village Blvd., West Palm Beach, Fla. 33409.

Memorials to honor her commitment to ministry



Sister Margaret Mary Seguin

remembered at Memorial Masses at 4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1, and 9 and 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 2, at the church.

Sister Margaret Mary died Sept. 6 at the Dominican Sisters' Mother house in Elkins Park, Pa.

She entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci in Albany, N.Y., in 1952. She spent the next 18 years of her life teaching in New Jersey, Cuba and New York. In following years, she coordinated a catechetical center, worked in catechetical education and then in retreat and residence ministry.

In 1977, Sister Margaret Mary arrived at St. Alexander's to serve the needs of elderly at Williamsburg Convalescent Home as well as coordinate the Eucharistic Ministers at Botsford Hospital.

She became involved in the planning stages of the South Oakland Shelter, while also participating in monthly worship services for women at the Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth.

She also volunteered as summer tutorial work in public schools, while representing the Farmington-Southfield diocese in the recent Archdiocese of Detroit appeal for the retirement fund for religious.

Sister Margaret Mary served organ in parish church in addition to teaching piano and music to religious education students. She also enjoyed knitting, cards, sewing and reading.

The Rev. Jim Wright of St. Alexander's Church celebrated the Mass of Resurrection at St. Catherine's on Sept. 9, before burial in the Archdiocesan Cemetery in Philadelphia.

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place you'll be able to discover ancient Egyptian artifacts that span over 3,000 years, including many well-known, mummy cases, jewelry and statues. So, don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime

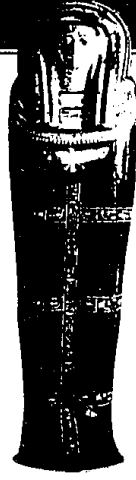


exhibit. Otherwise, you'll be the one doing the cursing. The Detroit Institute of Arts is

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Wednesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Weekends, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The museum is closed

Mondays and Tuesdays.

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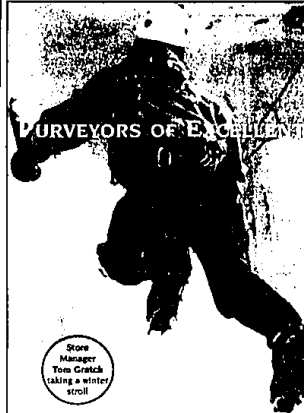
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