

SHORTCOMINGS



RENEE SKOGLUND

Playing Cupid

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the romantic English poet who penned those immortal words for her husband and fellow poet, Robert Browning, in 1850 in *Sonnets of the Portuguese*, was with us in spirit as we gathered in the cafeteria conference room to judge the Observer & Eccentric's "Lessons in Love" contest.

Was she really? Maybe. I don't know if Barrett, whose numerous physical ailments often required hefty doses of morphine to quell the pain, would have been able to read through the hundreds of entries we received. But Barret was no wimp.

In 1846, at age 40, she defied her father and eloped with the love of her life, the much younger and equally famous Browning. They settled in Florence, where they lived happily ever after until Barrett died in her husband's arms in 1861.

Cathy Young of our marketing department, the contest's organizer, did the initial screening. By the time she walked into the conference room, she had narrowed the entries to 60, the cream of the crop. Coffee and cookies in hand, we were ready to judge.

"I don't like poems. I'd rather have prose," said Doug Johnson, a former Stevensen High School teacher and one of the seven judges (the only male) as the entries were passed his way.

Not exactly what Barrett or Browning would want to hear.

"Hey, I like poems," said Young. "Maybe that's because my ex-husband wrote poems." We could tell Young liked poems because she always cooed and wrote "cute" on such entries.

Me? I'm the grammar nut. Spelling errors I can take, but run-on sentences and misplaced clauses...well, I'm like Zorro with a red pen, heartless. Slash, slash, slash.

Glennie Merrill, our director of creative services, put an end to my snobbery.

"Renee, can't you have an illiterate lover?" she asked.

Huh? Mumm. I guess you could. Sure, why not? After all, Rocky Balboa never said more than "Yo, Adrian," and we all know he mumbled his way through five block-buster movies with the faithful Adrian always by his side.

Actually, the entries were wonderful. They described star-lit skies, flower-strewn beds and walks in the moonlight. They talked about nights on the Riviera and sunsets on a hill-top. They came from 20-year-old girlfriends reunited with their true loves and husbands who said, "After 30 years, what can I say about my wife's blue eyes?"

I soon put away my red pen and sighed. I was falling in love. I wanted to go home, hand the entries to my husband and say, "Here, memorize these!"

Eventually, we chose the winners: Jeanne and Jim Thompson of Rochester Hills for the Eccentric and Barbara and Bill Rutecki for the Observer.

Congratulations. We wish you years of romance.

Okay, so just how many ways did Barrett love Browning?

She loved him to the "depth and breadth and height my soul can reach." She loved him to the "level of everyday's most quiet need, by sun and candle-light." She loved him "freely...purely...with passion...with the breath, smiles, tears of my life!" And, if God chose, who wrote, "I shall but love thee better after death."

Wow. She loved him like Jeanne loves Jim and Barbara loves Bill. Happy Valentine's Day to everyone.

Renee Skoglund is a staff reporter with the Observer and Eccentric. Contact her at (734) 953-9128 or by e-mail at rskoglund@oe.homecomm.net.

www.observerandeccentric.com

Happy Valentine's Day CONGRATULATIONS

Barbara and Bill Rutecki of Plymouth, Winners of "Lessons In Love" Contest

Here's how some of the entrants described their idea of a romantic evening:

"He stood, wearing only a towel, body still dripping onto the freshly shampooed carpet.... He fished through his underwear drawer, retrieving his boxers, the ones with the red hearts. 'O yeah! I'll need a big rope to lass this cowboy. I pulled out the red dress, the one I've been saving since the sidewalk sale.... We embraced. Let's watch TV.'"
- Mary and Keith Geiger
Garden City

"My idea of a true romantic night would be to spend the night laying in front of a real log fire in a secluded cabin on the shores of a large body of water, sipping sweet wine and listening to the waves crash into the rocks."
- Nancy A. Mitchell
Redford

"While my Love was still at home I'd call her and ask - 'Do you have plans tonight?' I've got two tickets...to Rome."
- Marc A. Marcolina
Westland

"After dinner, a relaxing late-night.... When we return home, back to the master bedroom where fresh fruit, the aroma of burning incense, flickering candles and our bed flowered with rose petals awaits us."
- Jared Perkioniem
Farmington Hills



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREMER

Happy couple: Barbara and Bill Rutecki enjoy a glass of wine before their entrée arrives at Café Cortina in Farmington Hills. In the background, the Café Cortina staff stand ready to make the Ruteckis' evening memorable.

BY RENEE SKOGLUND
STAFF WRITER

rskoglund@oe.homecomm.net

She was beautiful in her one-shoulder black cocktail dress. He looked like a handsome college professor (he's not) and was very attentive. Together they were a very romantic couple.

"She always looks beautiful," he said.

Bill and Barbara Rutecki of Plymouth, winners of the Observer's Lessons in Love contest, dined last Friday at a table for two in front of the glowing fireplace at Café Cortina in Farmington Hills. They arrived by limousine, compliments of International Limousine in Westland, and afterwards headed to Joe Louis Arena in Detroit to watch the Red Wings.

They already had received a dozen red roses from Flower's from Joe's in Livonia and a box of chocolates from Kemnitz Fine Candies in Plymouth big enough to last until next Valentine's Day.

Bill has Barbara to thank for their big night out on the town. Her winning entry that described a special message written in the snow many years ago was chosen from hundreds of others.

"I was shocked," Bill said. "Actually I saw the promotion in the Observer and I thought, wouldn't it be nice to win a weekend with the Red Wings."

It didn't matter that the Ruteckis were recent transplants from Chicago. Bill has become a die-hard Red Wings fan. "Good hockey will do that to you," he said.

Barbara didn't tell her husband she entered the contest until she won. She was surprised when Cathy

Young of the Observer's marketing department called.

"I very rarely, rarely win anything. At first I was trying to find out if someone was playing a joke on me. I was trying to identify the voice."

No, Barbara, this was no joke. You won.

The contest

The Lessons in Love contest asked readers to submit entries of 100 words or less describing a romantic evening for two. Two winning couples were chosen, one for the Observer and the other for the Eccentric.

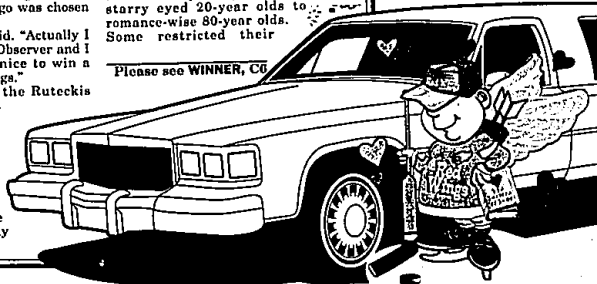
Hundreds of Romeo and Julietes replied. In Observerland, Livonia proved to be the most romantic city, with more than 75 replies. Canton played second fiddle with almost 40 entries. Plymouth, Farmington and Red-

ford, the least romantic cities, still produced 20 heartfelt entries each. Alas, Cupid aims his arrow at different hearts at different times.

Obviously romance knows no age limits. Contest participants ranged from starchy eyed 20-year olds to romance-wise 80-year olds.

Some restricted their

Please see WINNER, C6



Local railroader shares his story in lecture series

BY JONI HUBBED

jhubbed@oe.homecomm.net

The first thing you notice when you step into Richard Borsos' Farmington Hills home is the train on the welcome mat.

It's the first step on a journey back in time, into a house whose walls are lined with posters and photographs of railroad's glory days, a house lit with modified train lanterns and full of memories from his 48 years as a railroad man.

"I've had, I think, the most interesting life of anyone on the railroad," Borsos said as he settled back into a comfortable couch in his family room.

The son of a New York City telegrapher, Borsos decided at age 18 that was

not the career for him. Instead, he hired out as a steam locomotive fireman, a job that is not for the weak or faint of heart.

He recalls his first experience shoveling coal on a train that ran from Niles, Michigan to Chicago, after just two hours spent watching another fireman. As the train slowed, Borsos' job was to shovel coal into the firebox, which involved opening its doors with a foot pedal and then depositing the load into an opening no much larger than the shovel's blade.

Of course, to create the steam that powered the engine, he also had to continuously pump water.

Just keeping his balance was a real challenge. But Borsos will never forget his first experience on a steam engine,

which he describes in a voice filled with awe.

"There's no way to describe getting on one of those huge monsters, seeing those big rods moving and the syncopation of the steam coming out of the stack with every stroke," he said.

His love of trains will be the focus of a March 5 presentation, "Michigan's Rich Railroad History," part of the Trains, Planes & Automobiles historical lecture series sponsored by the Blue Circle and Farmington Big Apple Bagels. With support from Books Abound, The series kicks off February 19, with a presentation on local trolley history by Brian Golden, followed by the story of World War II bombers built in Ypsilanti February 26 with guest speaker Todd Hackbarth from The

Yankee Air Museum and on March 12, "How Automobile Touring Created the Diner," a presentation by Daniel Herschberger that will be highlighted by an evening meal of typical diner fare.

Borsos' presentation will tie in some Michigan history, labor history and railroad operations up until World War II. He worked as a fireman until 1952, when he got into management after qualifying as a locomotive engineer and obtaining a degree in mechanical engineering from Northwestern University.

Over the years, railroads fell out of favor, but in their heyday provided a transportation network valuable enough that railroad workers were prohibited from changing jobs in time of

Please see RAILROAD, C6

sdargay@oe.homecomm.net

Sharon Dargay, Editor 734-953-2054