

# Dan McCosh's Column



## Traveling in a mirror

I don't pick up hitchhikers anymore. There was a time I did, for a couple of years after I traded the thumb for some wheels and felt I had some kind of obligation to others on the road.

I don't know why I stopped, but probably because a couple of times I picked up some guy who looked like someone with good stories from a distance.

When he lurched into the car either he was barely coherent or had the kind of grim look that made you grip the wheel and be thankful when he got out of the car.

Regardless, the feeling of the brotherhood of the road left me a long time ago. I figured I built up some debts traveling, and I paid my dues.

**EVERYTHING** IN its time, and there is a time for traveling. Not touring, or visiting, or going some place.

There is a time when you can stop in a town and drop into the fabric of a community, when you are welcome because of your youth, and some people will let you stay a bit probably because they always thought they wanted to do something like that.

These became bigger debts, more than a three-mile lift down the road.

Now sometimes once a year or so we have had visitors. Usually from overseas, the scarcest of the travelers. Europeans touring the States, up against the exchange rate all the way.

Mainly they have come through town because some friend of mine who went through theirs invited them. None were exactly well off.

Americans in Paris can dance around a lot, but can't work. Tourists in general are welcome until the money runs out, and America is no exception.

I **HAVE BEEN** fascinated by the perspective a job provides in a strange place, how working both brings you closer, sometime too close, to the real fabric of the place, and at the same time cuts you off from some of the politeness normally due a tourist.

Since these visitors from overseas have been in the best frame of mind for traveling, looking for a change of experience as much as a change of scene, they generally put me on the defensive.

"Look, there's an American tree, do you have trees in England?" I joked, but tried as best I could to find something American, especially in this part of the country, with some kind of life of its own.

There was a supermarket, a visit to the lakefront, even Greenfield Village, which were interesting.

**BUT IN THE END** the tour left a singular impression.

We Americans live solitary lives, insulated from one another in our cities, entertaining ourselves in small groups of close friends.

My friend in Europe nearly died from some strange intestinal disease, and found, even as a stranger, the best medical care in three countries was free to him.

Our guests are in an alien country considerably more hostile. Aside from the crime, which is not so easily avoided by a stranger, one notices drivers licenses, car insurance, medical care, even the cost of transportation form a web of difficulty not easily negotiated.

Our guest, hopefully, had a good time. No matter how much we tried, though, we couldn't explain the country.

Instead, we got more confused ourselves.

## Carl Stoddard writes

### Post vacation regrets

We were driving through the Province of Quebec when we saw the flames.

As my wife and I approached, we realized the fire was in the vicinity of a small wooden building a short distance from the highway.

As we drove past we looked to see if the flames were coming from the building or somewhere behind. We couldn't tell.

"Do you want to stop?" I asked.

She stared blankly for a moment and then shook her head. It was too late, she said. We were already a mile away and still traveling.

Besides, it was our vacation.

**WE HAD TOURED** through Toronto and Montreal and the city of Quebec and then headed south toward Vermont. All we planned to do was enjoy the sights and our free time.

We didn't plan on seeing a fire.

It didn't take long to develop a series of rational explanations for not stopping. We figured neighbors would have seen the fire. Other people on the road would have gone for help.

We even saw a boy riding his bike along the road. No one seemed alarmed at seeing the fire, no one appeared to be taking any action.

We said the fire was probably behind the building. We said the building probably wasn't even a house. We said maybe the owner wanted to burn down an old building on his property.

We also said that even if it was a house, surely the people inside were awake and could have gone for help.

Surely, there weren't any children or old people in the house, that just wasn't very probable.

We told ourselves we were getting agitated over nothing. We told ourselves we were exercising good judgment. We told ourselves we could recognize a real emergency when we saw one and this was not an emergency.

**BY ALL ODDS**, we were probably right. But the problem is we didn't know for sure. We didn't stop to find out. We played it safe. We played it the easy way.

And, because we relied on reason instead of better instincts, we will from time to time wonder: "What if we were wrong?"

It is the kind of question that will come back to us at odd moments and make us uneasy.

The question is also one I never thought I'd be asking myself. Last winter, I wrote a news story about a Southfield boy who was hit by a car as he walked to his school bus.

The man who hit the boy stopped and tried to help. As he knelt beside the boy he attempted to flag someone else down to help. The cars whizzed by.

At the time I was particularly upset that people would ignore that kind of situation. I couldn't understand how people could act that way. Now, I think, I understand.

If I had it to do again, I know I'd come to a screeching halt on the highway, turn around and race back to the fire.

Unfortunately, such good thoughts are small comfort.

## Italian elegance for your home

TRADITIONAL FLORENTINE DESIGNS in antiqued gold and white display a classic grace. Shown are a few items from our collection in Home Accessories (#35)

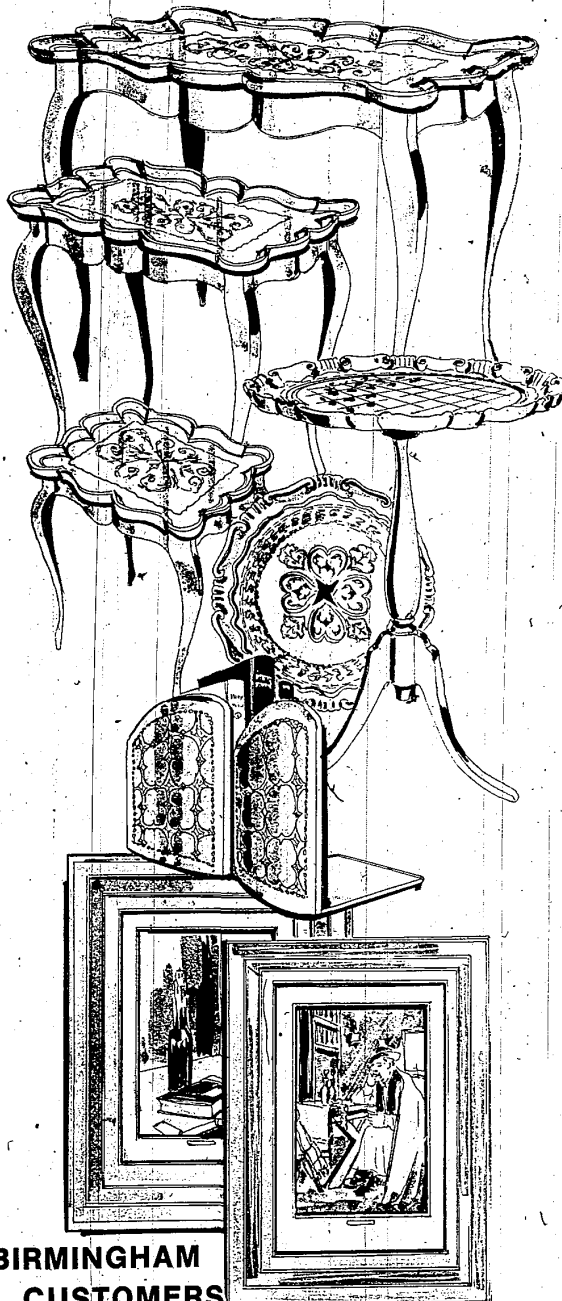
Westborn, Livonia, Birmingham and Farmington. Nest of 3 tables in your choice of two designs, \$80

Round pedestal table, \$30

Round serving trays, 9-3/4" size, \$3.75; 11-3/4" size, \$6

Pair of bookends in a variety of colors with gold, \$10

ORIGINAL OIL PAINTINGS FROM ITALY have just arrived at our Birmingham store. \$80 to \$250



## BIRMINGHAM CUSTOMERS

can park free! The new Ferndale Street Parking Deck is now open. Any Crowley's associate will gladly validate your ticket.

HENRY M. HOGAN, JR., Co-Publisher  
 PHILIP H. POWER, Co-Publisher  
 DUANE P. ROSENTHAL, General Manager  
 R. T. THOMPSON, Executive Editor  
 NICK SHARKEY, Managing Editor  
 ARTHUR SHAFER, Sales and Marketing Manager  
 Member of  
 MICHIGAN PRESS ASSOCIATION  
 SUBURBAN NEWSPAPERS OF AMERICA  
 NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

Farmington  
**Observer & Eccentric**  
 DIVISION OF SUBURBAN COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION

