

editorial opinion

"Between the lines"

by Carl Stoddard

It wasn't a dry New Year's Eve

"The basement flooded," my wife said matter-of-factly as she stood on the bottom step of the stairs looking at the growing pool of sewage that covered most of the floor.

Every few seconds the washing machine, which was still running, pumped more water into the laundry tubs. The water bubbled back up through the floor drains and into our newly refinished basement.

Sylvia calmly watched the basement turn into an indoor pool. She has a rare ability to know when not to panic. Flooded basements, she knows, are my problem.

The great flood began at 2:43 p.m. Dec. 31, just hours before our New Year's Eve party.

Hoping for the best, I rented a 50-foot steel snake and started shoving it down the drain. Sylvia, confident of my ability, began making arrangements to move the party to our neighbor's house.

Two hours later the drain was still plugged. I was ready to try a chemical drain cleaner, but Sylvia talked me out of drinking it.

While I figured out ways of selling a house with a flooded basement, Sylvia called one of those companies that rip out roots in sewers with rotating, which-a-macallits. The company promised to send a man out early the next morning. Sewer cleaners, it seems, don't celebrate New Year's Eve.

AT A RATHER ungodly hour the next morning, the sewer man arrived and went to work. He sewed sewage

and rotting roots all over our basement floor but couldn't unclog the drain.

"Can't go no further," he said. "Looks like you got a broken sewer line." Then he held up the battered end of his snake. "Look what it did to my cutter," he said.

I told him I was sorry about his cutter, reluctantly paid him \$25 for not fixing anything, and began calling sewer contractors.

"I figure it's right about here," the first contractor said after pacing across my front lawn. He was standing on a spot between the sidewalk and the street. Right next to him was a mature and healthy maple tree. Somewhere, down among the roots was my crushed sewer line.

The job, he said, would cost \$500 — more if the tree, sidewalk or part of the street paving had to be removed.

A second contractor promised to do the job for less than \$200.

"What we need," I told my wife as we waited for the third bearer of bad news, "is someone to come out here, size up the situation and figure out a way to get us out of this mess. Someone who knows what he's doing."

He knocked on the door half an hour later.

HE STOOD THERE in an old hunting cap, with a week's growth of beard and a huge wad of chewing tobacco in one side of his mouth. An hour later, I would be ready to kiss him. Well, almost.

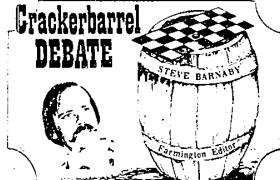
"Tell you what I'll do," he said as

Capital punishment is bunk

My resolution for the year is to speak out against all this stupid flak about the glories of capital punishment.

Journalists have to be prepared for such emotional issues. Eventually, The Observer will have to take a stand one way or the other. But, I'm not waiting around.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis put it best when he said, "Crime is contagious. If the government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for the law."



MURDER IS WRONG, whether it's done by a lone criminal or collectively by the state. Admittedly, capital punishment is the easy way out. But since when does a democracy remain free by its citizens taking the easy road?

We have an obligation to look for a more perfect and civilized manner in which to deal with criminals. We shouldn't stoop to the base level of a sick criminal.

Having to kill someone leaves a scar on a person's mind which never goes away. Believe me, I know.

I'm not telling this from the view of a far out leftie teeny-booper. When the kiddies were marching around campus protesting the Vietnam War, I was out sloshing around in the rice paddies with an M-16 in tow.

But then I believe all war is immoral, not just the Vietnam conflict. That's where I differed with the anti-war folks and their guru George McGovern. George was selective about what wars he thought were moral or immoral.

All wars are immoral because, at some point, they could have been avoided. Capital punishment is immoral because it sanctions taking another person's life.

So, let's avoid making ourselves the victims of our own crimes. Think twice if you'd like to be one of those persons to pull the trigger on Gary Gilmore. It's a nightmare to watch someone, whom you've just pulled the trigger on, die. I know that for a fact.

"Around the edge"

by Jackie Klein

The bells are tolling for exurbia

Yet, families, who moved to suburbs like Southfield, said they wanted good schools, a better chance for the kids, a nice place to live, fresh air and more fun out of life. Those who have reached exurbia describe their reasons in similar terms.

"However, the exurban elite is now an endangered species," Tarrant maintains. "Its members are beset with problems. Unlike the cases of such other endangered species as the whooping crane and the sperm whale, nobody gives a damn about the exurbanite except the exurbanite."

Many suburbs and exurbans have passed up federal grants totaling millions of dollars. Exurban towns, says Tarrant, are backing away from the Washington trough because they're afraid the acceptance of money will open the gates to let in the poor, blue collar workers and blacks. Tarrant contends this is one more thrash in the mounting 40th throes of exurbia.

The exurban good life is finished, according to the author. The pressure outside the barricades is growing. Within the walls resistance to change is feverish, but spirit and vigor are waning, Tarrant claims.

"EXURBIA IS DYING because its life sources are drying up and its organic defenses are eroding," Tarrant believes. "The restrictive zoning codes are under powerful and effective assault in federal and state courts and legislatures."

Expensive educational systems seem to have produced as many illiterates as cheaper institutions of learning, he contends. The exurban family is coming apart. The female volunteer, once the mainstay of a broad

range of community services, wants to get paid for what she does.

Exurbia is getting old, Tarrant says. It lacks the zip once possessed. The good life is now hard work and who can afford it?

The author isn't nibbling sour grapes. He made it to exurbia. When he wrote about the end of exurbia, a woman heavily into preservation of the environment argued, "We can't let this good air and open space go down the drain into an ugly megalopolis."

Tarrant claims the woman doesn't ask herself what it costs surrounding regions to maintain exurbia, wasteful of scarce resources, in its isolated splendor. He says it's enormously expensive to provide services in sparsely populated areas and the air is polluted by cars driven everywhere, heating and cooling homes and using numerous appliances.

"Meanwhile," Tarrant laments, "a nearby city is festering. There's no place for its inhabitants to move. Environmental concerns in exurbia are quite limited."

Illusions and elites are valuable. They help us visualize goals toward which we aspire. But when its preservation, the exurban elite and its habitat are no longer functional. The American dream isn't working out.

As the barriers come down, exurbans will no longer be able to avert their eyes from the problems of the people in the cities," Tarrant said. "From here in on, they will be us. It's the end of exurbia. If we work it right, it's the start of something better."

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Ecology Calendar

Ecology-minded persons who wish to save cans, bottles or newspapers for recycling may use the following facilities.

To prepare glass for recycling, thoroughly wash the containers, remove all metal caps and rings from the glass and separate the glass by color.

To prepare cans, separate steel from aluminum cans, paper need not be removed.

Newspapers should be tied in bundles with heavy string or a rope or secured in heavy paper bags.

- **SOUTHFIELD** — A glass recycling center operates 24 hours a day at the Burgh, 26600 Berg Road, north of Civic Center Drive, a block east of Telegraph.
- **SOUTHFIELD** — A mobile aluminum recycling unit is in parking lot L of Northland Center Tuesdays from 1:30-4:30 p.m.
- **LATHRUP VILLAGE** — Recycling center operates at the Public Services Building, 19101 Twelve Mile, adjacent to Southfield-Lathrup High School.
- **FARMINGTON** — A Glass recycling center operates Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon at the west end of Farmington Hill City Hall parking lot at Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

Farmington Observer

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