

editorial opinion

Joe Martucci writes

Book ban: Who decides?

Question: What do these books have in common?

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," the Bible, "The Grapes of Wrath," "Moby Dick," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Of Mice and Men" and the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.

Answer: These books, at one time or another, were banned from public or school libraries because they were considered offensive.

The list of outlawed books, compiled by the American Library Trustees Association Committee on Intellectual Freedom, contains more than a few surprises.

Such classics as "The Divine Comedy" and "Jude the Obscure" share the dubious honor with such popular works as "A Farewell to Arms" and "To Kill a Mockingbird."

The reason I mention these is that the issue of banned books came up recently at a Bloomfield Township candidates' night. Clerk Deloris Little admonished township library board candidates about the library's book selection policy.

Mrs. Little had been offended, probably shocked, by a book called "Human Scandals" carried by the township library. The \$12.95 book is a collection of pen-and-ink drawings by political cartoonist Brad Holland, whose work has appeared since 1971 in the New York Times.

"It shouldn't be left to (library) employees to select books," Mrs. Little asserted. "You ought to check that one out. It was absolutely disgraceful. It was making fun of former presidents."

A township resident, an elderly man, had brought the book to Mrs. Little's attention. He had been browsing in the library one day when a librarian recommended the book to him.

In his introduction to the book, Times' editor Tom Wicker writes "Human Scandals, from its first pages, rises to another and less obvious level, one with greater ideological content. At this level, Holland is commenting with explosive effect on what I'd call the 'social condition,' the contemporary plight of humanity."

Undoubtedly, some of Holland's drawings offend some people. These are not humorous sketches. They are stark, often depressing portrayals of social problems. Mrs. Little was apparently not impressed by Wicker's works of praise.

Nevertheless, the larger question here—the one raised by Mrs. Little—is not whether a certain book offends a particular township official. The issue is how the library selects materials.

I decided to pursue that and I learned that the township, a conservative community, has a library with a liberal policy when it comes to what books to buy.

According to the "Library Materials Selection Policy," books are chosen by the library staff members under the guidance of library Director H.G. Johnston

In choosing new books, the staff considers, reviews, backgrounds and reputations of authors and publishers, popularity of material and availability of funds.

"The staff endeavors to exercise the utmost in objectivity and professional judgement and bases its decision for purchase or rejection on these considerations," the policy reads.

That sounds reasonable enough, but to find out why a certain book gets selected, you have to go to the philosophy behind the policy.

The policy "is based on an awareness of the need to uphold the democratic principle of providing resources presenting all sides of issues and of representing the broadest spectrum of interests."

"It is not the duty or role of library employees to inquire into the private lives of library patrons," nor is it their duty to impose as mentors the patterns of their own thoughts.

"Citizens must have the freedom to read and to consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held or approved by any single librarian, publisher, government or church."

Therein, of course, lies the library's defense in selecting a book objectionable to a township clerk or anyone else. Banning books because they may insult a certain segment of the population amounts to denial of First Amendment rights.

The point, I believe, is that what one person might consider trash could be regarded as a classic by another. This is not to say that library shelves should be stocked with pornography. But as you can see from the books listed at the beginning of this column, many targets of suppression through the years have since found their way onto high school and college reading lists.

With all due respect to Mrs. Little, I think the library's selection policy represents the best interests of the greatest number of people. Some books will offend some readers. But who's to decide which books should be excluded? I, for one, would not want to make that decision.

"The American Library Association's "Freedom to Read Statement," which serves as a foundation for the township library's selection policy, makes the point more eloquently than I.

"We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons.

"We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe, rather, that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Joe Martucci is a staff writer for the Birmingham-Bloomfield Eccentric.

Shirlee's sallies

by Shirlee Iden

Is there a dog heaven?

It isn't the sound of her that I'll miss because Coco was a very silent dog the last few years.

She seldom barked; but sometimes she'd wince in pain if she walked into something or someone. And once in a while, she'd whimper aloud in her sleep, encountering some kind of doggie nightmare.

Coco was the grand old lady of our family, more than 100 years old if you figured 15-plus canine years into human years. The once-frisky puppy has been an aging dowerer in recent times, with failing hearing, sight impaired by a large cataract and arthritis that caused her pain, slowed her up and even prevented her from getting up and down stairs.

Sometimes she'd attempt some of her former friskiness and trip on her own legs or a leg would buckle under her, painfully.

Once a shiny, burnished chocolate brown, Coco's coat had become a faded gray-tan mantle of curly poodle hair.

She came to us as a 10-week-old puppy, complete with the pedigree that dog fanciers value so much. With four little ones in our house, I had always joked that we had enough animals already when the children would plead for a dog.

found that 10-year-old Lauren had heard her whimpering and had her cuddled close and finally asleep. Actually, Linda acknowledged the dog belonged more to the other kids because they could romp with her, take her out and do things that Linda's illness prevented.

For a few short months however, Linda was in remission, and she'd walk the puppy, play with her and enjoy her along with her brother and sisters.

It was Linda that named her, of course. And after putting much thought into the matter, the dog got a missable French poodle name: Linda's Miss Coco Coquette.

Three times she gave birth to litters of little chocolate brown poodle pups. The first time, her firstborn didn't survive the birth trauma and it was Lauren who understood that the pup had to be taken away from Coco so she would care for the survivor.

HAVING new born puppy litters around the house was always exciting for the kids and a sociable event too, because all the neighbors would troop in to see the little dogs.

I always accepted Coco as the kid's dog and a regular member of the family and considered myself rather menialistic when compared to true animal aficionados. But I fooled myself.

Coco was into her middle years when the vet decided she should have surgery to be spayed. Following the operation, she had problems coming out of the anesthesia and we feared the dog would not recover. I reacted so emotionally it surprised everyone, including myself, but she had been Linda's dog and now she was in danger.

It was Elaine who first got Coco to eat when the children were allowed to visit their dog at the veterinary hospital, and then we knew she'd survive. The vet kept tabs on Coco for weeks afterward, taking her to work with

him so he could observe her recovery. He remembered Coco from the first time Linda carried her into his office to determine if the pup was healthy. Coco passed muster that day and from then on she was a favorite of Harold Duchan, our gentle vet.

Coco and I had a special relationship because I fed her every morning and indulged her snacking habit when we had dinner every evening. She would follow closely under my feet when I prepared dinner and through all the years, sat next to me during the meal gratefully receiving special tidbits.

Lauren always took her for check-ups, saw that she was wormed and cared for medically. Recently, she'd bring her dog, Shada, to visit and the two dogs got along just fine.

BUT COCO led a solitary life with all the children gone from home and Jack and I away at work all day. When life also became difficult and painful for her, the decision that she should be put to sleep was clear.

When I got home Thursday, Jack was there before me—kind of unusual. He didn't say much at all. Then I went to put some trash into the kitchen wastebasket and Coco's orange bowl was there.

I looked up and said "Jack?" questioningly. And he just nodded yes. Later, he told me he had been with Coco all the time, watched while Dr. Duchan gave her an injection and she just went to sleep.

On a shelf in our family room, there's an antique frame with a faded color photo of a pretty young girl cradling a young chocolate brown poodle, Linda and Coco in the time of the child's remission.

One is a dearly beloved daughter that will never grow old, the other our faithful Coco, who's also in a place now, we hope, where there are no more bad dreams and no more pain.

Tinkering Around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Showers dampen spirit

If this was a word association test and someone mentioned the word shower to me, I'd probably answer wedding instead of rain.

I would have to alter the last couple of months. Every few years one of the Fates decrees that a large percentage of my friends decide to try their luck at wedded bliss. This is one of those years.

Since most of my friends are still working on their first trip up the aisle, the inevitable shower invitation usually makes its way to my mailbox.

The last time I enjoyed a shower given in someone's honor, I was about 11 years old. I remember they wrapped bingo and I got a charge from yelling after each number was announced. Needless to say I embarrassed my poor old mother.

But I had a good time. Nowadays, I cringe every time I get a shower invitation. It's not that I don't want to buy someone a present. I enjoy giving my friends gifts although on some occasions I've wondered who will end up with the present when the marriage crumbles like a piece of old wedding cake.

What I object to is that for anyone over the age of 11, showers ought to be boring.

I mean there are only so many ways you can ooze and ooze about on a slow cooker before you begin to feel a little hypocritical.

AT LEAST the guests ought to begin feeling like hypocrites. Outside of members of the immediate families, who really cares if the bride and groom are gifted with a slow cooker or a thermo-blanket?

My argument is that bridal presents are like the family's secrets and ought to be kept from public display. It's a little gauche to hold up the loot and expect people to ooze over it.

I could probably ooze and ooze without any trouble over Caroline of Monaco's wedding presents. Her first child will probably end up with a gold-plated teething ring from Cartier's.

But my friends, without exception, are of considerably more humble means. I can feel happy that they've received some nice things. But I hate having to put up with a shower to express my happiness.

I have noticed that shower conversation—much like wedding and funeral small talk—centers around Aunt Ely's latest operation or Cousin Jim's busted marriage. Usually, the happier the occasion, the more solemn the conversation.

The last shower I went to I was treated with a sitchy sitch account of Uncle Henry's hernia operation. And they thought Lyndon Johnson had a lot of gall when he stewed the press his scar.

I wish they would continue to play bingo at showers, though. It's the only thing I like about them.

I wondered though if her family had to give all the presents back.

I could be wrong. In the right hands, I bet a shower ought to be lots of fun. I just don't have the right frame of mind for the things. When I first heard about the movie "Psycho," I knew the plot involved a woman being murdered in a shower.

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turning over their plate to discover a number taped to the bottom. After that you get to listen to all 2,000 numbers being called out as guests receive little door prizes.

To call out these numbers and make the crowd stay interested is a task I wouldn't give to Richard Burton in his prime, let alone a bride-to-be.

I wish that women had been smart enough early on in the formation of wedding customs to realize they were getting shortchanged. Women get to entertain all the parents, aunts and the runny-nosed cousins who always seem to be about 8 years old. Men, on the other hand, manage to have a party without all the relatives they would rather not see and reminisce about the good old days with their friends.

It's not fair. But I'll admit I could be wrong. Showers are not customary in my family. My mother didn't have one. Neither did my grandmother. And if I ever get myself into the sad position of having one for myself, I intend to be out of town on that weekend.

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"Around the edge"

by Jackie Klein

Let's boycott meat

Remember when they used to say a newspaper was something you wrapped fish in? With the price of fish today, you're lucky you can afford the newspaper.

I no longer ask how much hamburger is a pound. I want to know how much it is a karat. I've even thought of sharing our dog's favorite brand of canine morsels. But it went up 10 cents a can.

Maybe it would be cheaper if the dog shared our hamburger. But I'm not buying any because I'm planning my own boycott. I hope others will join and take my tips on how to survive.

The first night of the boycott wouldn't be too bad. I would go to the vault, dial the right combination with trembling fingers and withdraw three precious steaks. With a headdress's low-spiring care, respect and emotions, I would cook my last meat supper, more precious than a Rembrandt medium-rare.

I would warn my teenager she'd better eat the fat or she'd find it in her lunch box the next day. I would tell her bones are good for her teeth. I'd promise the dog to take him out for a whopper burger after the boycott.

THAT TOOK care of the first night. How about the rest of the week? How about spaghetti with horse meatballs, soybean balls or golf balls? They'll never replace the good old fashioned spicy Italian meata balls.

How many cans you cook tuna fish? Tuna casserole, tuna delight, tuna salad, tuna cutlets, tuna surprise, tuna helper and spaghetti with tuna fish balls are all I can think of.

But mine would taste like Charlie the Tuna and other rejects they throw back into the water.

We put a cooking utensil into a hot oven and call it a pot roast. We could make french fried cauliflower but cauliflower is more than a buck a head. Mayflower is more than a buck a head. Mayflower is more than a buck a head. Mayflower is more than a buck a head.

The thought of eggs conjures up images of bacon, ham, sausages, salami and chicken livers. But they're

all boycott no no's. Weiner schnitzel is nowhere without the veal. Eggs Benedict without Canadian bacon is like Zsa Zsa Gabor without caviar.

Don't give up hope. If we sold our stoves and refrigerators, we'd have enough money to eat out for at least six months. When the money runs out, we can always sell our kitchens.

THAT WOULD give us enough dough for vegetarian cooking lessons and a dozen meatless cook books. Maybe by the time we buy back our appliances, the boycott will be over.

In the meantime, I have a confession to make. Tucked away in the vault we have a museum piece worth a fortune. The longer we keep it, the higher its value.

To be sure it isn't stolen, we have installed a burglar alarm in the kitchen. At the west end of Imlerion Hills City Hall parking lot, Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

Volunteers collect newspapers the first Saturday of each month, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

FARMINGTON — A glass recycling center operates Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon at the west end of Imlerion Hills City Hall parking lot, Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

SOUTHFIELD — A glass recycling center operates 24 a day at the Burgh, 25600 Berg Road, at Civic Center Drive.

SOUTHFIELD — A mobile aluminum recycling unit is in parking lot L at Norland Center, Tuesdays, 1:30-4:30 p.m.

LATHRUP VILLAGE — A recycling center operates at the public services building, 1910 Twelve Mile, adjacent to Southfield-Lathrup High School.

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Your Ecology Calendar

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

To prepare glass for recycling, thoroughly wash the container, 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, rope or secured in heavy paper bags.

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