

Monday's Commentary

Dale Michelson writes

Aching tooth takes big bite from holiday joy

Christmas, we're told, is a time of merriment and joy, a time of celebration and gaiety. It's a time of year for family gatherings and thanks.

For most, it's certainly not a time for gnawing on wet towels... "for most," that is.

While family members gathered around the punch bowl and delighted as the youngsters recklessly tore open carefully wrapped gifts, I mumbled hamburgs and wrestled with the child-proof cap on a bottle of aspirin in a desperate attempt to kill a toothache.

And while friends and relatives tuned up for a hearty round of Christmas carols, I forced myself to believe that with a little effort I could dismiss the pain and settle down to an enjoy-

able holiday. But you know how those self-imposed pep talks go.

Actually, the tooth troubles began two days before the Christmas holiday. But like all sensible people, I put off calling the dentist. No sense rushing into these things, right?

There's sound reason for such logic, for not screaming for the dentist at the first twinge of pain. After all, the problem might only be temporary. It might even be imaginary.

Unfortunately, the problem is very identifiable. It's called fear. Of course, we all realize that such fears are senseless and without reason. Or are they?

TODAY'S DENTIST is to be consid-

ered an angel of mercy, what with his noiseless equipment and painless drills. Pain is in the mind, not in the hands of the good doctor.

Humbly, Such were the ideas my parents planted in my mind when I was too young to argue. At the impressionable age of 10 this coward was dragged kicking and screaming to the dentist so that a bad tooth might be removed.

A painless operation was guaranteed and rewards were promised. But when I felt the bite of pain, I lunged from the deep chair and broke for the outer office. Trapped by a quick-footed receptionist, I was hauled back to the chamber of horrors where the angry dentist gave me a tongue-lashing and two sharp slaps across the face.

So much for a child's confidence in the good doctor.

Since that eventful day I've harbored a very real fear of dentists. In my more controlled moments I shiver and sweat as I envision hunched-over men armed with gleaming picks and probes.

AND IT'S a sinister man indeed who can mastermind a filling to such an extent that the pain lies dormant for months, only to surface at such a time when relief cannot be found—a time like the Christmas holidays.

But perhaps that's my problem. By refusing to acknowledge the toothache, I can argue against visiting the dentist. Or it could be that I just haven't

fares very well at all when visiting the dentist.

On one unfortunate visit the doctor pulled the wrong tooth. On still another visit, the good doctor informed us that because my teeth were so hard, it would be pointless to inject pain killers into my gums. "Just hang on tight and we'll be done here in a few minutes, son," he said.

And only a few months ago it was my misfortune to arrive for my bi-annual visit a little early. Leaving through a latticed magazine, I came across a review of the movie Marathon Man. If you read the book or saw the movie, you know how the main character was tortured by the bad guys. You see, they strapped him in

this dentist's chair and then took this little silver probe.

Still, I've always heard that a good dentist can see the pain in the patient's eyes. But why is it that they never see the tears streaming down my face as I inform the receptionist between sobs that I've arrived for my appointment.

And then there's the well-intentioned dentist who quips, "Tell me if I'm hurting you."

Once, even though my mouth was packed with gauze and tons of fear, I attempted to explain my fear of flying, but was interrupted.

"This may hurt a bit, son, hang on." I'm still hanging on.

Shirlee's sallies

by Shirlee Iden

Theater's not kid stuff

All the world may be a stage, but not everyone gets to play the part he may want most in life.

Whether it's the stage or other areas of the arts, some of our most creative persons usually have to put bread on the table by working at establishment jobs until they reach a plateau in their art when they can truly be themselves.

Two people I know who are giving the arts a good try and giving area theater goers fine theater as well are Ralph Valatka and Michael Szymanski.

You've probably seen the Valatka name before. Ralph is the producing director of the Southfield Repertory Theatre. He has also been the cultural arts person for parks and recreation.

Now he's left the latter job to try to make it full-time running the theater. And it's no fly-by-night operation. Southfield Repertory Theatre has five solid years of achievement behind it.

Coincidentally, Michael Szymanski went to University of Detroit High School when Ralph was there too more than a dozen years ago. They hardly knew one another then, but right now they are working closely to bring theater lovers a special treat.

Michael is the writer-composer of "Peddler's Parade" which will open here on Jan. 11 in its world premiere.

VALATKA is the producer-director of the children's opera, the second of

Szymanski's shows to be produced by the theater. "Sweet Milk of Madness" premiered with the Repertory Theatre last year.

"Our Children's theater is not kid's stuff," Valatka will tell you. "About 30 per cent of our audiences are adults who stay with their children."

"That makes it important to do important things." Such as producing a work by an unknown writer-composer even though the theater has to be run in the black.

"This is not a community theater," Valatka explained. "We pay each actor and each technical person a salary. It's small, but it's a salary." Incidentally, the Southfield Repertory Theatre is one of the few that do this.

Valatka said the theater has a subscription audience they can depend on, but they also rely on direct mailing and word of mouth a great deal.

"A show like peddler is a great risk," he said. "It costs us about \$5,000 to put on a production like this. Every school child in Southfield will get a discount coupon good for 10 per cent off aid libraries in three counties are also making the coupons available."

Shows like the recent "Nutcracker Suite" and the upcoming "Sleeping Beauty" and "Rumpelstiltskin" are usually guaranteed money makers and get back the theater's investment.

BUT IF people in the arts didn't

gamble once in a while and do shows like "Peddler's Parade" then how would people like Michael Szymanski find their place on life's stage?

Like Valatka, who has supported himself working for the city, Szymanski is supporting himself, his wife and two children as a ranger for a Girl Scout Camp at Howell.

Since age 18, he has been writing music, but he has been studying it since he was five when his mother started him with piano lessons. "I've written a lot of tunes," he said. "But I really enjoy the medium of opera. I like this form even better than musicals, it allows more freedom."

Freedom's vital in the arts. When company's like Bendix, Federal Mogul and the Manufacturer's Bank of Southfield extend themselves with financial grants as they did to the repertory theater recently, then people like Ralph Valatka and Michael Szymanski can also extend themselves creatively.

Some of us may be asked to show our support more than ever soon if Valatka has his way. "I'm going to speak with Mayor (Donald) Fracassi soon about support for a truly regional theater," he said.

Meanwhile, supporters of the arts and of music, are really going to be the losers if they don't go to see "Peddler's Parade." It's an opera for children with a message for kids of all ages.

Useless info fun to read

Opening mail has always been one of the little things in life out of which most persons get a kick.

Ever since the pony express galloped across the western plains, persons have waited with great anticipation for that letter from afar.

I've always gotten a big kick out of opening mail, especially the junk stuff which inevitably provides a person with a lot of useless information that, nevertheless, is interesting to know.

That's one of the fascinations in the journalistic trade—opening the junk mail every morning. Let me provide you with some of the tidbits which usually get thrown out.

This morning's mail is typical of the "interesting" junk.

For instance, I learned from the Red Cross that each human contains 70,000 miles of blood vessels. That's more than 2 1/2 times the distance around the world. Within this system, approximately 10 to 12 pints of blood circulate, continuously performing its life-giving functions.

Speaking of body statistics, another news release provided the following information. The body has approximately 206 bones, nearly 700 muscles and almost 250 joints.

Now, admittedly, to the layman this information is pretty useless. But just think of what a trivia star you could be at the next party you attend.

Of course it may depend on how much your brain grows and, consequently, how many of these gems you can remember. You see, the same press release tells us that the brain grows rapidly up to the age of 5 and generally stops growing by the age of 20.

Hm. There may be a correlation between when your brain stops growing and your waist starts expanding.

The National Wildlife Federation provides us with some rather strange facts.



Kidnapping, it seems, is a plight which animals share with humans. For instance, a 75 pound Galapagos turtle named Little Rock was whisked away from a Brooklyn motel room in 1978. Kind of makes a body wonder what a 75-pound turtle was doing in a motel room by itself.

A large octopus was kidnapped out in California but was later found abandoned on the floor of a San Francisco ladies' room. A batch of snakes valued at \$5,000 were abducted from a reptile house in Maryland.

A pig was stolen from a farm in Missouri's Washington County, but by the time it was recovered in St. Louis she had produced eight piglets.

Some critters made news (while others made mocs) by making unusual adjustments to man's presence. A city-wise fox set up housekeeping under the bleachers in Yankee Stadium. And in Baltimore, a peregrine falcon, normally a bird of the wild, settled on the 32nd floor of a downtown building.

The Federation named Koko, a 130-pound California gorilla, as the animal who behaved the most like a human. He learned 375 "words" in the sign language used by the deaf. Koko learned to lie, insult, and swear in sign language.

Some animals found it difficult getting along in a human-dominated environment? Take, for instance, a deer who crashed through a Beltsville, Md., woman's bathroom window and landed in her bathtub.

While the Whale, on the other hand, strayed into a port in Cherbourg, France, and paralyzed harbor traffic for five days before dying of starvation.

FARMERS AND THEIR bureaus are big for sending in mail. Because the mail is addressed to the Farm editor it always ends up on my desk. Some persons believe Farm is short for Farmington.

Over the years I've learned a heck of a lot about agriculture in this state.

For instance, milk production in Michigan for November was 394 million pounds, a two per cent increase over a year ago. At an average daily production of 32.3 pounds per head, Michigan cows gave one per cent less milk than October, but one per cent greater than last year and a whopping five per cent over November 1976.

Why, I even have a 1978 "bugsheet" to post in my barn or milkhouse, compliments of the Michigan Milk Messenger.

A "bugsheet" you say. Well, from what I can ascertain, it is a national fly control guide for dairymen. Basically, it's a list of pesticides to be used against various kinds of bugs, including safety precautions while using them.

Now, I ask you, how many city boys like myself have in their possession a bugsheet?

This is what I get for opening junk mail. But the farm mail doesn't stop there. I have publications from the Michigan Bean Commission (which, by the way, names a Bean Queen every year), a publication on Michigan vegetables from 1972-77, Michigan Food Facts and Corn harvesting and marketing statistics.

Heck, I'll never have to worry about going to Michigan State University, I'll be able to learn all I want about agriculture from my junk mail.

Well, that's about it for today's mail. This was fun. We'll have to do it again someday.

Just remember, folks, parsley has three times as much Vitamin A and C as oranges.



Hors d'oeuvres

by Lynn Orr

Facing the cynics

Well, he got to the screen, red cape intact, and minus the catch airbrushing of past production. And the PR superstars appear to be working its magic. Hordes of fans swarming the select theatres where Superman films on the big-screen guarantee a stock rise for the promotion firm.

Unfortunately, the crowds are enduring considerable discomfort to hear an admittedly gorgeous Chris Reeves talk about "Truth, Justice and the American Way" in the face of Gene Hackman's satanic plots to destroy the system.

As one of the crazies who stood half an hour in line to purchase a ticket, only to return the evening for a nearly 45-minute endurance test in a crowd crunched before I could scramble to a seat, I'm here to protest about the unweaving and pack-aging of "Superman, The Movie."

Re: the technicalities—if advanced tickets must be purchased, why can't a theater offer numbered seats? I like to sit near the front, but from the fifth row the north pole fortress looks like a wad of fuzzy Kleenex.

UNFORTUNATELY, the plot is just as fuzzy. Terrific special effects do not a movie make in my book, although the loud cheers and applause in the theater confirm my minority status on the issue.

About halfway through the showing, I figured out the problem—schizophrenia—not on my part but within the film.

At least three different moods give you the feeling you're watching a three-act play written by three different authors unaware of each other's intent.

A post-movie discussion with my film buff

brother confirmed my suspicions. The imprints of at least three different directors failed to reach the ceiling floor, he says.

After a booming visual and auditory credits repeat that would be hard to beat as a moodsetter, the Krypton episode is dead serious with show-stopping cinematic spectaculars.

Unfortunately, although perhaps in the black humor vein, the film quickly degenerates as the babe lands on Earth. One can only assume that the film editor was on her coffee break when a particularly soppy shot of the 18-year-old Superman-to-be and his Earth mother in a clutch shot went through the movieola.

The symbolism gets as thick as the Hulk's biceps when Superman discovers his mission as the "only son" sent to save the primitive earthlings from their follies.

The boasting of Lex Luthor in his underground hideout flashes out the fallen angel ready for the battle between good and evil.

When Clark Kent arrives at the Daily Planet, the film turns to high camp. By now everyone knows that the man of steel's vision passes Lois Lane's test when she asks him for the color of her underwear. The pitch heightens from amusing to silly as the battle draws near.

Since I'm sure superfans will test out the film for themselves, I've no doubt the producers will see their investments safely through to "Superman II," already in the works. And because fantasy appears to be the only marketable asset in the cynical '70's, we're bound to be faced with a load of LL's in the future as Superman, lacking "The Force" but armed with his many talents, solves the world's problems with a twist of the wrist.



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