

Monday's Commentary

Should we toy with fate or avoid sudden death?

Human tragedies are often predictable.

The first heavy snowfall of the winter results in a rash of deaths as people's hearts fail due to overexertion.

Every Fourth of July or Labor Day it's predictable that someone will be shot or stabbed in a family squabble.

On opening day of deer season someone will be accidentally shot, and someone else will drop dead of a heart attack.

On Memorial Day some child will drown in a pool.

During the Christmas season a home will burn down, and during the early-morning hours of New Year's Day a motorist will be killed on the road.

Yet our foreknowledge that the potential for tragedy exists has not helped us in preventing unexpected and sudden death.

Maybe it's because we always expect tragedy will come to the other guy, not us. But, deep within us, we know eventually tragedy will strike us or very

close to us if we continually challenge "fate" by not exercising care and common sense.

THIS VERY MINUTE we all know the upcoming Christmas and New Year's season will result in a lot of parties in homes, restaurants and clubs.

Right now, without thinking very hard, we also know alcoholic beverages will be served at those parties. And we know, this very minute, that drinking and driving can lead to sudden death.

And if we think just a little bit, we'll admit abuse of alcohol also causes many tragedies beyond death on the highway.

Because we know all these things, right now, why don't we spend a couple minutes more thinking about steps we can take in planning entertainment to prevent needless death or harm to ourselves and others.

The first thing we can do is to be reasonable in mixing drinks. We do no one a favor by mixing one heavy with alcohol.

Learn to take "no" for an answer. Other people know their condition and limit best — don't press them to have "another" when they politely decline.

It's a biological fact that the body needs about one hour to get rid of the alcohol in one drink. The host, therefore, should plan to close the bar one hour before the planned end of the party. Ask your guests to stick around for coffee and food because the longer you keep them from driving after their last drink, the safer they will be.

IF YOU HAVE small children, put away the liquor bottles and empty all glasses before going to bed at a party.

Children usually will get out of bed sooner than their parents on the morning after a party, and discover bottles and unfinished drinks. Alcohol can be a deadly poison for a small child.

Avoid using shallow, foil-type ashtrays because they just don't do the job. Spread around a number of large, deep ashtrays and empty them often. Keep

wastebaskets out of sight of smokers. Smokers should make sure an ashtray is nearby before even lighting up.

When the party ends, empty all ashtrays one last time and make a final survey to insure there are no smoldering butts which could cause a fire when you are sleeping. Check under and between cushions, under tables and chairs, and check the rugs for any "hot" ashes.

The kitchen is a popular gathering place, but it's dangerous for the cook to be handling hot food with a lot of people mingling around. So clear everyone out.

If young children will be at the party, put all breakable items out of reach. Whenever possible, it's a good idea to assign an older, more responsible child to keep an eye on the younger ones.

The above suggestions don't require a lot of effort to follow, but they will go a long way toward reducing the chance of sudden death during the holidays.

To paraphrase Smokey the Bear, only you and I can prevent many holiday tragedies. Shall we?

Mike Scanlon writes

Laser pistols and polecats are odds and ends to ponder

The only real problem about writing a regular column, other than disgruntled column subjects approaching column writers the street with opened straight razors, is what happens on those occasions when the column writer cannot think of what to write in the column.

This week was not one of those occasions.

First came news that a 27-year-old New Mexico man claims to have invented a laser pistol that will shoot planes out the sky at 5,000 feet. Now, if that doesn't sound like you like something that would make a good column, just chalk it up as one of the reasons why you're not writing one.

Pick up your telephone, dial 505-623-8876 and in Roswell, New Mexico, you will reach this gentle man, whose name is Gene Robbins. More precisely, you will reach a woman who will tell you that Mr. Robbins doesn't give interviews. She will offer to read you a statement by Mr. Robbins in which Mr. Robbins says words to the effect that he does not give interviews because he doesn't want people to think he's got something that will blow up the world. Which, of course, is exactly what it sounds like he's got.

Scratch one good column. But maybe it's all for the best. Things are bad enough when the subjects of columns only have straight razors. Things would get worse if they had laser pistols.

Later, still looking for a column, you will come across the rather astonishing news that the United States government paid \$20,000 for polecat scat, or feces from the Siberian polecat. The government did this to train dogs to recognize the scent of the black-footed ferret. The closest living relative to a black-footed ferret is a Siberian polecat.

THE BLACK-FOOTED FERRET is the rarest

mammal in North America. In fact, it's so rare that a team of scientists has been hired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ferret one out, so to speak. They have been looking for the last three years. It has cost, so far, \$3.5 million.

And so far they haven't found one.

They're starting to think, some of these scientists, that maybe, just maybe, the black-footed ferret is no longer the rarest mammal in North America. Maybe it's what used to be the rarest mammal in North America because maybe, just maybe, the black-footed ferret is extinct. Which is a pretty good-sounding word to use in connection with polecat scat.

Moreover, the scientists, some of them, aren't really sure that there's anything all that bad about the black-footed ferret being extinct. The scientists think the black-footed ferret lives almost exclusively on a diet of prairie dogs. The government has spent millions to eradicate prairie dogs. It has done a good job.

By the way, the way to look for a black-footed ferret when you don't really want to find one or you've got three years and \$3.5 million you don't know what to do with, is to drive out onto the grassy plains of North Dakota, or Montana, or Wyoming. It doesn't matter where. Just pick a spot. Wait until it gets dark. Shine a light out onto the prairie. Wait for the light to hit the distinctive, glowing green eyes of the black-footed ferret.

Just as dawn breaks, get yourself a dog. Stick its nose in a dish of polecat scat and watch it run away, out onto the grassy plain. Hope it finds a ferret.

But anyway, this whole subject is clearly too ridiculous to make a decent column. All it's good for is what it was used for, a front page story in The Wall Street Journal.

from our readers

'Just the facts, please,' irate Hills resident pleads

Editor:

The Farmington Observer has done a disservice to the community and diminished its credibility as a molder of public opinion by publishing the strident and ill-considered editorials of Steve Barnaby on the subject of housing for senior citizens.

The Observer's news columns have rightly reported the inopportune remarks of an overzealous member of

the Farmington Hills city council who has characterized the majority of voters as "ignorant, hateful people who have thumbed their noses at senior citizens."

Such inventive, when attributed, can be accepted for a news story. It is repugnant, however, for an editorialist (one whom one would expect to be professionally reasoned) to similarly abuse the voters and the city council of a

community served by his newspaper.

Barnaby's latest tirade disparaged those citizens who opposed the senior housing proposition as "sick" and "un-American." For an editorialist to disagree with the majority of voters is one thing; for him to be obviously disgraceable is quite another.

Barnaby also chastised some of the city council for bending to the will of the electorate, which had overwhelm-

ingly defeated the public housing proposal. He thereby, rather willfully, but implicitly, advocated government by dictatorial junta rather than by a democratic body responsible to its constituents (PoliSci anyone?)

The Observer has taken an unsavory position. Mr. Barnaby should publish an apology to the citizens of Farmington Hills for his gross excesses.

IT MAY be a revelation to the editors of the Observer and the officers of Suburban Communications Corporation that few, if any, youthful citizens of Farmington Hills either despise or fear the aged or infirm. (What an insensitive assumption.)

Most residents of the Hills are indeed mature and self-sufficient persons, many of whom are righteously resentful of the machinations of avaricious land developers and misguided politicians who have waged a concerted, and deceptive campaign to break the city's long-standing building codes for reasons that seem to be more than self-serving than altruistic.

Barnaby, the Suburban Communications Corp., are out of touch with their public, if not in league with the would-be despots.

If Mr. Barnaby cares to develop a degree of competency as a journalist, I suggest that he do a few investigative editorials on the following subjects related to senior citizen housing:

* A definition of the term senior citizen has become a Pavlovian buzzword at the sound of which all good Americans are exhorted to stand and cheer. I refuse to be conditioned. I want

to know at what age and at what financial level government bureaucrats consider a person entitled to public housing that is to be funded and supported by my taxes, local, state or federal. If there is such a definition, I hope it excludes youngsters under 65 and the financially solvent.

* A clear explanation of the priority that residents of Farmington Hills could expect in the rental of a government funded high rise apartment. Actually, there would be practically no preference — not even length of residence. Farmington Hills would be a factor.

* An in-depth analysis of the effect on the community if a high rise ghetto and welfare housing were to be in Farmington Hills chiefly for the benefit of persons who have never resided in, nor paid taxes to, the city.

* The possibility of a conflict of interest in the case of two council members who have voted on zoning matters and fanatically supported public housing although they are reportedly licensed real estate operators.

Just the facts, please, Mr. Barnaby, no more vituperation.

LEE C. O'CONNOR
Farmington Hills

Editor:

It never ceases to amaze me. Just when I think the Observer has started to show some responsible journalism you print an article of ineptness, any good writing goes tossed aside, I refer to the Crackerbarrel Debate (Dec. 3 "Patterson Goes for Blood").

It becomes rather obvious that Mr. Barnaby has a personal dislike for Mr. Patterson. Unfortunately, he refers to what he considers Mr. Patterson's style rather than to the issue at hand — that being the return of capital punishment to the State of Michigan.

As with most people who object to capital punishment, Mr. Barnaby means nothing of the victims of criminals or the families they leave behind, nothing of a family's indignation and possible retribution which could easily let free brutal murderers, rapists, robbers, etc., to reap more hardship and pain upon the general public, nothing of the so-called victim compensation system which has failed miserably. No, as always these people are concerned with how will the "poor murderer" meet his end and whether his civil rights are properly taken into account. I really take offense at Mr. Barna-

by's reference to white collar crime as a capital offense to be treated the same as murder or rape. He gives the impression that the only people who will see the death penalty are "impoverished blacks and Caucasians." Might I remind Mr. Barnaby that the last four men who met the death penalty were

stupid reasoning. I will make a concerted effort to contact Mr. Patterson's office to see whether he has any spare petitions he can send me.

In closing let me totally admonish the Observer for printing such a biased, pointed on-one-side article. Let's try to do better in the future so us folks on the reading end do not have to put up with such irresponsible journalism.

PAUL LUKACS,
Garden City

from our readers

Letters must be original copies and contain the signature and address of the sender. Limit letters to 300 words.

Reader raps Crackerbarrel stand

Editor:

Although I personally have not always agreed with some of Patterson's excursions into the public forum, I must gag at the watery "60ish" liberal rep by some writers and especially under the guise of crackerbarrel philosophy is the ultimate joke.

American crackerbarrel has meant a sounding board of the nation, so I say

check your statistics on "capital punishment" and I think you will find the American people are ready for an alternative to our present system. It is ironic to me, a society that will send innocent young men to die in a war, yet is disturbed over the killing of a miserable guilty wretch.

I would pull the switch.

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