

Success with aging has spawned a social crisis

Every day it gets tougher to sit back in the easy chair and read the newspaper.

"U.S. Running Out of Cash For the Aged," screamed the headline in big, bold print. Newspapers and television stations around the nation are carrying the story. But, in truth, the nation — its people — pay little attention.

Oh sure, we hear from all the "I told you so" groupies. You know who I mean: "I told you we were going to run out of Social Security money before it was our turn to collect."

Somehow it's always those beacons of blame, the politicians, who get the flak from the "I told you so" bunch. And in some way they probably are to blame.

But, in truth, the reality goes beyond blaming any special group. This country, so wealthy, so abundant in natural and scientific resources, has so quickly

and effectively dealt with the aging problem that we've bested ourselves.

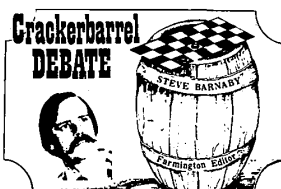
In short, more and more of us are surviving longer and we are unable to afford it. At least I would like to think it was due to inability rather than unwillingness.

But a look around the suburban Detroit area demonstrates that our efforts to deal with the senior citizen crisis is simply feeble.

SURE, WE BUILD a few senior citizen housing projects to save our collective consciences. But we're just not keeping up.

The problem of dealing with senior citizens is much larger. And the real moral question is whether this nation will be willing to take care of its elderly.

We could be facing a war of survival between the middle aged, middle class, the elderly and the youth of this country.



As our population grows older, leaves the workplace and its income decreases, the middle aged income earner feels the economic pinch of fewer resources, a devalued dollar and more senior citizens.

In the year 2030, 29 percent of this nation will be 55 years or older; 29 percent will be no older than

19 years and 46 percent will be between 20- and 54 years old.

The numbers add up to a startling statistic. A minority of the population will be supporting a majority.

Now my more liberal, optimistic side would like to think that, of course, we'll all pitch in to help out. But my more pessimistic side says that isn't how society reacts.

Look at the condition of our school finances today. In the halcyon days of education when every home had a school-aged child, millages always passed. No matter what, there was always money for education.

Today, the educational cupboard is bare, as bare as the number of children in our schools.

IN THE YEAR 2030 I would be 84. On the other hand maybe there won't be any place for 84-year-olds in our society in 2030. Hope I'm wrong.



Tim Richard

A college Prexy's case for openness

Whether they realized it or not, some community college trustee friends gave me a dandy wad of ammunition for defending the Open Meetings Act.

The Open Meetings Act is a sacred cow to newspeople, and should be to everyone. We (the public) need open meetings of governing boards so we can know what the board plans to do before it acts; so that we can know who's influencing the board; so that we can know how individual board members behaved and thought; and so that we can have our own influence.

Michigan's Open Meetings Act is under constant attack by public officials. Last year the legislature passed two amendments which would give governing bodies the right to interview candidates for top jobs in secret session and to review top officers in secret session.

Fortunately, Gov. William G. Milliken vetoed them. Our local officials must get used to sunlight.

THE AMMUNITION the trustees gave me was a speech by Eldon Schaffer, president of Lane Community College in Eugene, Ore. The trustees had been to one national convention or another and were "turned on," as the young folks say, by Schaffer's fervor.

His title: "The President as a Friendraiser."

Keep in mind, now, that some of these trustees still want to interview presidential candidates and review the performance of the president in secret.

"Post-secondary education clearly is not one of society's top interests just now," said Schaffer. Someone must have told him about the tax-cutting movements in Michigan.

"Friendraising is simply more important than ever before. Survival of our colleges — at least at a tolerable level of service — is at stake.

"We can't go it alone. We must form alliances, with groups and individuals. And the final test of our friendraising will be this: Do our efforts contribute to the acquisition of the favorable attitudes and the resources which we must have in order to operate?"

"THE PRESIDENTIAL role in this effort is crucial. There's no substitute for the president, whether we like it or not, everyone wants to hear about the college from the horse's mouth."

"They know that the president is one person who can really influence the college's direction. They key on us. We can't get off the spot. Harry Truman was right."

"Presidents set the tone and direction for friendraising. It is we who lead in the formulation of a mission that guides the college."

"People give of themselves, their dollars and yes votes to support ideas. They want to hear from us about exciting plans to serve students. . . . The leadership can't be delegatd."

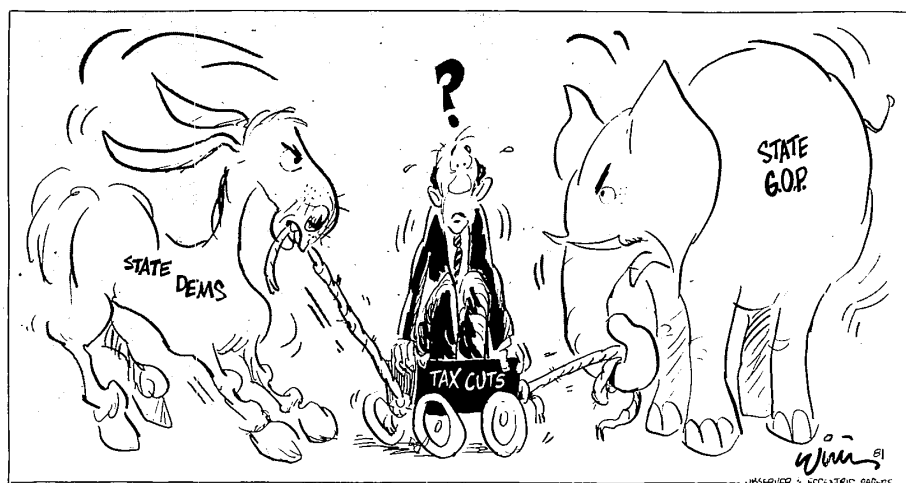
SCHAFER WENT ON to talk about winning the enthusiasm and support of staff, students and public.

He advocated plenty of input, both in the college committee process and at board meetings, for faculty unions, classified unions and students. He reminded all of the need not only for open board meetings but "plenty of good seating for anybody interested."

And he said an effective president can devote up to 80 percent of his or her time to public contacts — "friendraising."

The presidency is too important a position for the board of trustees to conduct secret interviews in hotel rooms, as Oakland University did. The president is too important to be reviewed in closed sessions, as most colleges do or try to do.

If these bills to gut the Open Meetings Act come up again in Lansing, I'm going to take that speech along to the proper legislative committee.



Reality can challenge a liberal view

I live in a northern suburban area euphemistically called a "changing neighborhood." It doesn't take a dictionary to decipher this real estate jargon — it's a formerly white area that's turning black.

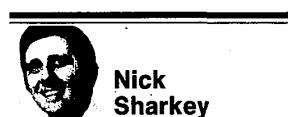
My city has been slowly and undramatically changing. The transition has been smooth. There has been no noticeable white flight — whites fleeing in fear of dropping property values. Perhaps high interest rates for home loans prevent most people from moving, but I would like to think that people are maturing.

Unfortunately, most whites have no experience living with blacks. Northern cities have long boarded housing laws which permit blacks to reside where they choose. But economics has forced minorities to live in specific areas, continuing segregated housing patterns.

I was raised in an upper middle class home in a northern city. I lived near persons of my race and economic status.

I knew much about the equal rights battles for minorities. My father proudly repeated the story of being at the Democratic convention in 1948 when a group of Southerners walked out during a heated debate over civil rights for blacks. Of course, he stayed and fully backed a young Hubert Humphrey.

Although I was very young, my parents discussed with their children the background of the Supreme Court decision in 1954 that prohibited segregation in public schools. I followed closely the news reports of Little Rock in 1957, the freedom bus rides



Nick Sharkey

of the early 1960s and Martin Luther King. My family backed the rights of all persons to equality.

BUT IT ALL had little meaning to my existence. When I became a baseball fan at the age of 7, my favorite player was the black centerfielder of the Cleveland Indians, Larry Doby. But three years later when someone asked me the name of my favorite player, I replied, "Al Rosen." Rosen was the white third-baseman for the Indians. Although no one had said anything, I had learned that in the 1950s a white boy did not have a black player as his favorite.

In high school, one of my best school buddies was the only black person in the class. I talked to him often during the day and worked on assignments with him. But I never asked him to come to my home. I knew it wasn't right for a black to visit a friend in my neighborhood.

My life continued as an almost pure white existence until the "changing neighborhood" started.

Even that was so gradual it has almost gone unnoticed.

First a black family moved a couple of blocks away. Then more families moved to surrounding blocks. But still none lived on my street.

My children began to have black friends at school and even brought a few home to stay all night. I coached black children along with my own sons on soccer and basketball teams. It all had no effect on me.

Then one night I drove into my driveway after a day at work. I noticed the three new black children on the block were playing in my garage. And I didn't like it. This time I knew the black children would not be gone in a few hours. Every day I would see them on the block.

Many thoughts quickly flashed through my mind such as "ghetto" and "rapidly falling property values." My emotional response was the same as those bigots I had hated all my life. I knew that, but I couldn't help myself.

In thinking about it later, I realized that for all my liberal upbringing, my life did not prepare me to live with blacks. Nor has it for most whites.

I am adjusting to my "changing neighborhood," thank you. It's going to take time and I still have to work out my own biases. I know they are wrong, but that doesn't make it any easier.

One thought has comforted me through this process. My children will never have to go through this. That's nice to think about.

Who says lightning never strikes twice?

Down through the years, folks have been passing along the word that lightning never strikes twice.

Generation after generation has heard the old saying and they never questioned it. They took it for granted on the theory that what was good enough for their fathers was good enough for them.

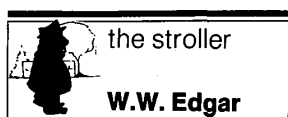
But take it from The Stroller, it isn't true. And he ought to know. He has just been hit the second time. And this time the blow was much greater than the first.

Years ago when he was a young fellow going to school back home in the Dutch country, he was hit the first time. The blow came after he was forced to leave school. One thing he had pride in was the old school building.

He had known no other building, and he attended regularly from first grade up to high school.

He was always proud to tell visitors it was where he was taught by one of the best school masters in Lehigh County. And The Stroller always felt the old building would be his choicest bit of property in the old home town until he passed away.

But the day came when he had to leave school and the old building. It was heartbreak enough to leave school, but there was some solace in the fact that the building was still there.



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

Then came the first lightning blow. After The Stroller left his classrooms, the town folk decided to evacuate the building and send all the pupils to the new high school several blocks away.

The blow came when it was decided to raze the old building and turn the area into a playground.

YEARS PASSED, as they always do, and in 1973, The Stroller was working on the Observer staff. Among other things, he covered the Garden City Board of Education. It was an interesting job.

Then one day the story leaked out that The Stroller had never graduated from high school. Some folks couldn't believe it, especially after he had won the "gold bell" for his reporting of the education scene.

Members of the board of education passed along

the word they would take care of that. On commencement night he was asked to report early for the exercises, to be held on the athletic field of Garden City West High School.

He reported on time. The educators began to smile when all of a sudden The Stroller was handed a cap and gown. He was told to march with the class, but continue on to the platform.

As he walked out of the gym attired in the cap and gown and feeling very proud, he was stopped by the board members. He was told he was being made a member of the National Honor Society — a high honor for a high school graduate — and that his name would appear officially as a member of the class.

Then a few weeks ago, lightning struck again. This time it was in the form of an action by the board of education to close the school.

No longer will there be a Garden City West High School. With its passing The Stroller has lost his alma mater and all the thrill of the commencement evening of 1973.

He now is an honored grad of a school that no longer exists. And when he goes back home to take look at the old building in which he was started on the educational trail, he'll be looking at a playfield.