

Opinion

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O&E Monday, August 26, 1985

Social customs undo tough drunk driving laws

THEY TELL the story, in the Wall Street Journal, of the Norwegian man who was washing his parked car when it was hit by another driver. Police smelled beer on the breath of the non-driving car washer, who ended up in prison for three weeks — for drunk driving.

Norway's harsh laws are getting intense study from American officials who worry about the human and monetary damage attributed to drunk driving.

There are fallout worries from drunk driving. Bar owners are getting sued by drunks who have accidents. Drunk drivers sue state and local governments for off-road "obstructions." Everyone's insurance rates — not just bar owners, but governments' and other auto owners' — seem to be soaring.

heavily taxing alcohol but otherwise tolerating drunk driving. On paper, our laws are tough, due in part to the efforts of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). But laws and social customs are two different things, and we might as well recognize it before we begin lobbying our legislators for ever tougher laws. Consider these obstacles:

- Norway's taxicab system is used by a large percentage of the population, particularly drinkers. Michigan families, particularly in metropolitan Detroit, have a habit of multilevel ownership and of driving to do almost everything. And the average southeastern Michigan resident wouldn't be caught dead, let alone drunk, in a bus, and wouldn't dream of supporting rapid transit.

- Many British, continental and even older American communities have neigh-

borhood bars that are within walking distance, or even a short driving distance, of home.

In these suburbs of Detroit, a neighborhood bar isn't possible under the zoning laws. Moreover, local governments look at liquor licenses as an economic development tool, issuing them only to hotels which make a multimillion investment. Thus, while one side of the politician's face says "tougher drunk driving laws," the other side prohibits the kind of neighborhood bars that could reduce drunk driving.

- Our society loves litigation. A European nation will try, convict and hang a killer in the time it takes the Michigan criminal justice system to get him arraigned in circuit court. If you are charged with third-offense drunk driving — which could cost you a prison sentence

— you hire a lawyer and fight.

The prosecutor, burdened with felony cases and suits over shooting mourning doves, will cave in and reduce the charge to first-offense drunk driving to avoid going to trial.

- Suburbs here practice urban sprawl. Traffic patterns are scattered, and cops can't be everywhere at once. The odds against your being nabbed for drunk driving are one in 3,000 or so. In hillier and more mountainous nations, where traffic is concentrated in valley roads, it's easier for cops to patrol.

- Great Britain closes its bars at 11 p.m. or midnight. Michigan allows "last call" at 2 p.m. and closing at 2:30. Even politicians who vote enthusiastically for tougher drunk driving laws won't dream

of moving up our closing hour to 11:30 or midnight.

- Norway bunks its prisoners four to a cell. Michigan, with its liberal courts, needs special legislation to bunk two to a cell. There's always a Michigan lawyer available to file suit against jail conditions.

TOUGH PENALTIES don't work in Michigan. We've tried.

We need to look at social customs. We need to look at the bar industry, its location and hours. And surely we need to cut funding to law schools so that we have fewer lawyers looking for drunk drivers to defend and lawsuits to file.

It's everyone's problem. Even if you don't drink and drive, you're paying high insurance and taxes because of people who do.

MICHIGAN HAS a long tradition of

Those tired of suburban life should look around

I ONCE READ a humorous book in which the writer, whose name I have long forgotten, quipped, "The suburbs are great for the children but no place for grown-ups to be."

The author griped about gardeners manureing her lawn at \$50 a mow and then spending hours herself planting shrubs and flowers and pulling weeds.

She complained about the age of automation in our suburban paradise where air conditioners break down when the temperature reaches a sizzling 90 degrees, garbage disposals get stuck and the

electric eye on our garage doors blink and go blind.

She wrote about cement jungles, high density traffic, towering skyscrapers and boring homeowners association meetings during which members grumble about ugly rubbish cans and dogs watering their bushes.

HOW LIKE Erma Bombeck, how facetious I thought at the time as I related to the sassy suburban satire. But then I read an article entitled "Lives of more than a billion women are devoid of what we take



Jackie Klein

for granted." That really rocked my socks.

In Mexico City, a woman wakes at 5 a.m., eats little or nothing, straps her baby on her back and walks a mile to a field. There for 10 hours she bends and stoops and plants or hoes. No \$50 gardener here.

At 3 p.m. she scavenges for firewood and carries it and her child back home. There she pounds grain kernels into meal and prepares other food. No micro-wave oven, no dishwasher to knock out.

By 6 P.M., she's ready for another walk, three miles roundtrip to fetch water. At

dusk she kindles a fire, then cooks, serves and eats an inevitably bland and nutritionally inadequate meal — the only kind she can afford.

No suburban barbecue grill, no steaks, no give yourself a break today at McDonald's.

THE WOMAN in Mexico City may have lived anywhere in Africa, Latin America or Asia. The lives of more than one billion women — the majority of the world's population — are devoid of what we suburbanites take for granted.

In many rural villages, the birth of a female is often considered a disaster and she's viewed as an underdog. Roughly, one out of every three women on earth can't read or write.

In many areas, women must walk miles to get water. Children tag along carrying smaller buckets. Once back home, kids

pitch in to boil the water to make it safe for drinking. Nobody worries about the coke being new or classic or with cherry flavoring.

THE BOOK about the suburbs being great for children talked about the kids' need for clean air, a yard, a barbecue pit and the feeling of roots which comes from a recreation room with Ping-Pong and pool tables.

A child must flourish in places called Bonnie Brae Glen where civic clubs and the PTA meet weekly. Girl Scouts watch birds in the park, houses have four walk-in closets and a stereo in every room.

When you think about these billion impoverished women and underfed little ones, you realize the suburbs are great for children and a wonderful place for grown-ups to be.

discover Michigan

THE MICHIGAN Historical Museum in Lansing this fall will open an exhibit dedicated to the depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps. The museum is at 208 N. Capitol and is open weekdays 9:30-4:30 and Saturday noon-4:30.

During the depression, 90,000 CCC workers built more than 500 bridges, 33

airplane landing strips, 5,600 miles of roads and planted 134,000 acres of trees. CCC operated between May 1933 and October 1942.

For northern travelers, there is a CCC museum at North Higgins Lake State Park near I-75.

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