

## points of view

## There's nothing wrong with a little scary stuff

SHHHH! TURN down the lights. Sit close together. Hold hands if you want to. Now listen.

An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin.  
An' make fun of ever'one an' all her blood-an-kin.  
An' one c', when they was "company," an' old folks was there, She mocked 'em, an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care!  
An' 'tist as she kicked her heels, an' turnt to run an' hide!  
They was two great Big Black Things a-standin' by her side.  
An' they snatched her through the ceiling 'fore she knowed what she's about!  
An' the poble-uns'll git you ef you don't watch out!

There. Did that scare you? Did it make you jump? It should have. It scared the dickens out of me when I was a kid. That was the point.

That was the point when James Whitcomb Riley wrote "Little Orphan Annie" in 1885. It was part of a tradition of American scary tales.

GENERATIONS OF Americans grew up on such stories. The "scare" tales threw into them was fun. It was similar to the scare you get when you take that first giant drop on a roller coaster or when you watch Boris Karloff lumbering around in his crude makeup as Frankenstein's monster.

Being scared, for the fun of it, is part of American popular culture.

That's why I got a bit disgusted when the media jumped all over a story a couple of weeks ago about a Livonia resident complaining to the school board that her first grader had been so frightened by a poem read in class that she had tummy aches and hadn't been able to sleep for months.

The poem, "The Body," from a collection called "Scary Poems for Rotten Kids," followed in the tradition of the scary tale — something that frontier kids thrived on but something that, if you believe this mother and some other parents at the school, some modern kids apparently just can't handle.

That's too bad, and it is, I sus-



Jack Gladden

pect, the fault of the parents, not something genetically different about today's children.

I haven't been able to get my hands on a copy of "Scary Poems" yet, but I did get the other book the Livonia parents were protesting, "Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark."

Guess what? That book is a collection of scary tales from American folklore — the kind I've been talking about — and it includes such classics as "The Golden Arm" ("Whooooo's got my golden armmmmmm?") and "The Hearsie Song" ("The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play pinchle on your snout...").

My wife and I grew up on such stuff and we loved it. It was scary, yes, but it was an exhilarating kind of fright. And our parents always pointed out that it was only a poem or a story or a movie. And now my daughter, the first grader, wants a copy of the book for herself. She loves it, too.

THE LIVONIA schools (to their credit) didn't crumble to the complaints of these parents who appear to be taking things much too seriously and apparently passing such attitudes along to their children. But the schools did promise to put together some kind of "sensitivity training" for teachers so they'll be able to deal with the "common ground between teaching youngsters who might have problems with certain literature and the district's responsibility for the other 27 kids in the class."

Right. How about a "sensitivity training" program for parents who are raising kids who don't seem to grasp the difference between fiction and reality?

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. He lives in Canton Township.

## A day at a federal prison

WHAT DO KENNETH Weiner, Chico DeBarge and Wallace Davis have in common?

Weiner, the former Detroit police executive; DeBarge, the pop music star; and Davis, the defrocked Chicago alderman are all in the federal prison closest to Detroit, the Federal Correctional Institution at Milan.

On a recent weekday, Federal Judge Bernard Friedman and an assortment of judges, magistrates, attorneys, therapists and journalists journeyed on a prison bus to see what a federal prison was like.

The bus, with its barred windows and slightly rancid smell, was the most prison-like setting we were to see. Because, the saying is true, at least compared to what I saw on a tour of the state prison at Jackson a few years back, if you have to serve time, do it in a federal prison.

"We like to think of it as a college



Judith Doner Berne

campus," one prison official said, as we toured the unguarded, self-enclosed, manicured grounds.

It was nearly lunch time, and the 1,409 inmates (as of April 30) clothed in fatigue-style uniforms were doing various things. The tennis and basketball courts were full, several inmates were running the track, and a dozen or so were sunbathing on an adjacent hilly slope.

THEIR INDUSTRIES operation, where they make equipment for the

prison and the government, was humming — although the decline in defense spending has had an impact.

Approximately 550 inmates work in the factories on two shifts, but there is a lengthy waiting list for work since it is something to occupy time and a way to save money.

Prisoners also have a chance to sit or further their education. Milan High School has a branch at the prison, so prisoners graduate with a regular high school diploma, not a GED. And this spring 25 students received four-year degrees from Cleary College.

I was struck by the fact that we saw no barred cells. We also saw no privacy. Both in the older dorms and in the newer ones known as "the sub-urbs" tiny cubicles had only room for a double decker bed, desk and dresser.

Rooms in a newish, smoke-free dorm also had toilets.

Like the state system, the federal prison population has increased dramatically. Two years ago, it held 560 prisoners; two years ago, 1,200 — so nearly all rooms built to hold one inmate are double.

Who are they and why are they there? Nearly half are in for drug-related offenses.

Fifty-seven percent of the prisoners are white, of which 22 percent are Hispanic; 40 percent black, nearly 3 percent are Native American. Less than 1 percent are Asian.

PRISON OFFICIALS must deal with that diversity. Kosher meals are brought in for religious Jewish prisoners, a tent-like structure called a Sacred Sweat Lodge must be provided so American Indian prisoners can smoke their peace pipes.

They must also deal with an aging prison population, due to mandatory sentencing without parole.

Davis and another prisoner talked about the mandatory sentencing, saying the deterrent factor must be weighed against the hopelessness of those convicted under it.

There is a time, they say, which is right for a prisoner to be let out. If he stays too long in the system, he has no chance for a successful rehabilitation.

Oh, what about Kenneth Weiner, Chico DeBarge and Wallace Davis? DeBarge, serving 60 months for cocaine possession and distribution, helped serve us lunch.

Davis, serving 8 1/4 years for racketeering, works in the business office and was one of two prisoners we interviewed. He said he is co-authoring a book about his life with Oprah Winfrey.

Weiner was not to be seen. He was stowed away in the detention unit, for his own protection we were told.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor of the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

## Mandela visit like a concert tour

By Jay Grossman  
staff writer

NELSON MANDELA is in town today. But the dignity isn't there.

His U.S. visit feels more like a Madonna concert tour than the arrival of a world leader.

Want to see him? Pay \$10 a ticket, or watch him on TV. Want to remember the occasion? Go buy a T-shirt or a coffee mug.

Thanks to the Rev. Jim Holley, you might even be able to buy a pair of \$50 Mandela gym shoes to commemorate the event. Holley's hoping Detroit will take to them like Air Jordans.

First things first. I respect Mandela as much as the next person. I believe he has a good heart and a smart head. I also believe he can prevent the dismantling of South African apartheid from becoming a bloodbath.

And I think it's great that millions of Americans will get to see him. It's how they're seeing him that I don't like.

What if you can't afford the price of admission, as so many in Detroit cannot? What if you have to decide between the \$10 ticket — or dinner for the family?

WHY CAN'T WE make the whole

thing free? If not at Tiger Stadium, then how about Hart Plaza? We can even have a parade along Woodward Avenue and show how bold we are by having it start north of Eight Mile.

But that's not happening because one thing's missing: dollar signs. Which, unfortunately, is what this visit is all about.

Mandela's here to raise money for the African National Congress, his political group back home. He's not here to see the Pistons, Greentown or the Renaissance Center.

He's here to raise cash. So if you like Mandela, you better like the ANC. Which many people, black and white, don't. But that's not the point.

The point is I don't ever remember Gorbachev coming to town and selling tickets to sing at the Fox. Nor have I ever seen a pair of Margaret Thatcher gym shoes for sale. How about George Bush underwear?

The ANC and its supporters seem satisfied to use Mandela's popularity as a way to make some money for

their cause. The guy is big news and they are riding him.

IT IS NOT to promote his views, because those views have already been heard a dozen times in a dozen different cities.

Nor is it to see the Statue of Liberty, or a Civil War battlefield. Or any other piece of American history to let Mandela know what this country is all about.

It is to sell tickets and T-shirts to raise money to buy weapons. Mandela hopes those weapons will never be used. But he is a 72-year-old man, and I'm afraid apartheid might outlast him.

So when he comes to town today I hope we can all hear his message, listen to his words, and appreciate the kind of world this man believes can be created if we just learned to work together a little better.

And I hope we can do this without buying a T-shirt.

Jay M. Grossman is a reporter for the Rochester Eccentric.

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