

POINTS OF VIEW

# Training must precede diversity in schools

On June 10, I delivered the commencement address for the 1993 graduating class of Pontiac Northern High School in Oakland University's pastoral Meadowbrook Pavilion. The afternoon was sunny, the beautifully multi-racial mix of graduates and honored guests attentive and appreciative. I advised the graduates that this day was far more than just the day they would get to have their pictures taken in ill-fitting gowns and weird-looking hats. It was the day they must begin their serious trek toward further preparing themselves to contribute to the betterment of the economy, and also embark upon a crusade against racism and other dehumanistic "isms."

The spirited applause that greeted my letter observation indicated that, despite the district's decade-long multi-million-dollar deficit, it has man-

aged to teach its students the right stuff regarding American democracy. Or maybe the kids learned the right stuff from each other.

There's nothing better than growing up together for enabling black, white, Asian and Hispanic youngsters to get clean through the superficiality of skin color. And the success of their future crusade against bigotry and segregation will greatly interdepend upon their trek toward economic betterment. The accomplishment of the first will facilitate the second, and vice-versa. Thus, not only should we seek better ways to prepare all young people for the workaday world — we should also continue to inservice educators on cooperative interethnic interplay. Such inservicing is particularly important in school districts which — unlike Pontiac — still remain racially homogeneous.

We can't let our disgraceful failure to



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provide proper financing for Michigan's schools stop us from offering this essential kind of educator-sensitizing. During my days as assistant superintendent in one overwhelmingly white and Christian school district, I found out through hard experience that some staff members' need for this training was even more vital than I'd imagined. It's something many parents need, too.

This was reaffirmed in the recent board of education race in that same district which I entered and lost to a more "conservative" candidate who wasn't even born when I started teaching. (But perhaps that's another column.)

In the wake of Proposal A's defeat, the state must prepare a Proposal B that will honor its legal and moral obligation to provide full and equal educational financing for all public school children. Until that happens, school districts may have to request that human rights groups like the Anti-Defamation League, the Race Relations Council of Metropolitan Detroit, and MOSAIC step in and offer multi-cultural sensitization inservicing for free in light of the schools' present insolvency.

As I told the Pontiac graduates, "To give is to get" — something it took me

nearly 60 years myself to completely realize and understand. I'm willing now to give my time to help schools provide this inservice, and I think other social activists throughout Michigan would be similarly willing.

Early in the coming century, every American school and neighborhood will become as multi-ethnic as Pontiac. Then all of our children will grow up prepared to crusade against bigotry and intolerance, like the beautifully diverse Pontiac Northern High School Class of 1993.

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# '50s high school studies had priorities in order

In the mid-1950s I was a member of the Roswell (New Mexico) High School Marching Band. I played first chair alto saxophone. The only reason I sat in that distinguished seat was because the other two alto players were even worse than I was.

The whole band, for that matter, was pretty bad. Discordant would have been a kind way to describe our sound. But none of us planned musical careers. I had signed up for band because it was either that or phys ed, and my athletic prowess was worse than my musical ability. The same was true for most of my young colleagues. And we got to parade on the football field during home games. It was the 1950s and band was fun.

Then there was the football team. There were basically two types of football players: the bruisers, who were less than academic geniuses but who liked to get out on the field and kick butt, and the BMOCs (that stood for Big Men on Campus).

jobs at filling stations and hung out at the drive-in. The BMOCs, in addition to being the star quarterbacks or half-backs or receivers, were also the class presidents, the leads in the class plays, the presidents of the student council and the homecoming kings (the counterparts to the homecoming queens who were always either cheerleaders or baton twirlers).

After graduation the bruisers dropped out of sight or turned their part-time service station jobs into full-time jobs as mechanics. The BMOCs and the band and chorus members went to college to study engineering, pre-law, teaching, physics, journalism or geography.

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JACK GLADDEN

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with a football scholarship and the only one I knew who got a band scholarship was — ultimate irony — me! (I forfeited it after a couple of weeks in college when I dropped out of band.)

There were no groups calling for a "return to basics" in the curriculum. Our curriculum was already pretty basic. There were drama clubs but no drama classes. School plays were directed by teachers who coached the drama clubs on their own time.

The school paper was put out by students working after school with a teacher-adviser working on her own time. There were no journalism classes.

There were no full-time counselors, no reading specialists, no social workers or media specialists, no crisis intervention programs.

No sex education programs and no concerned citizens groups demanding that the sex education programs be stopped.

There were no band parent organizations. No athletic boosters. No parent committees drumming up support for school millage votes. There were no su-

perintendents threatening to shut down all extracurricular activities if voters didn't approve a tax increase and no school board candidates threatening to hold their breath and turn blue if the superintendent didn't resign.

There was no teachers union urging voters to approve higher taxes to keep school programs intact but refusing to make any concessions themselves to achieve the same purpose. Teachers didn't make a lot of money, but it was enough, and they enjoyed their jobs.

Students who wanted to learn got a decent education. Those who didn't care fell through the cracks, and there was no government commission demanding to know how this could have been allowed to happen.

It was the 1950s and everyone involved with the public school system — students, teachers, administrators and parents — seemed to have their priorities pretty much in order. What happened?

Jack Gladden is a copy editor for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

# Finding Huntington's gene more miracle than chance

The news out of Ann Arbor was stunning. Tom Rice in Northville was elated. The religious right, however, didn't seem to notice.

My friends in the religious right, a nickname for those who hold the Bible as scientific as well as religious truth, insist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is unproven. Not even our nation's space shots have shaken their belief that the stars are embedded in a firmament (Genesis 1: 6-8 and 14-17) rather than drifting in deep space.

Darwin demonstrated that evolution indeed occurred, but he didn't know how. That step was taken by a Catholic priest in Austria named Gregor Mendel (1822-84). Working in a cloister garden, Mendel gave us the idea of genes, teeny-weeny units of heredity. Darwin died (1882) without learning of Mendel's work.

Tom Rice operates the Giftfinder shop on Northville's Main Street. I met him when I acquired my banjo. Each summer he organizes a Folk and Bluegrass Festival with some of the biggest names in the country. It's a benefit for the fight against Huntington's disease.

Rice's sister, Donna Jarski, died in 1974 at 31 of Huntington's disease, an inherited, incurable and fatal disorder of the nervous system that usually strikes people between ages 30 and 50. A folk music hero, Woody Guthrie, died of Huntington's. It affects about 30,000 Americans.

The scary thing about Huntington's is that one person in 12,000 carries the gene, but doesn't know whether it will affect his or her children. Donna's three kids don't know if they're carriers.

The Bluegrass Festival this year will be Sunday, July 25, at Northville's Ford Field. Watch the entertainment pages for times, details and ticket information.

University of Michigan scientists are part of a six-laboratory consortium in the United States, England and Wales doing genetic research.



TIM RICHARD

Headline in the current Michigan Alumnus magazine: "Scientists Finally Snare Elusive Huntington's Gene." Out of 100,000 genes in the human body, they spotted the one that causes Huntington's. It was "the most difficult gene hunt yet," said Francis C. Collins, the internationally famed leader of the U-M team.

"It's a great relief," said Rice. Probable result: Scientists will be able to predict the onset of Huntington's — "we'll be looking into a crystal ball with clarity never before provided," said Collins.



PHOTO

Stunning news: While a gene for Huntington's disease has been identified, the cure has yet to be found, and Tom Rice in Northville is organizing a Blue Grass concert to raise funds for research.

Meanwhile, Time magazine (May 31) reported on the "first attempts to cure a disease by gene therapy." Cure!

It seems they can insert genes into babies to treat genetic diseases, but now they're talking about replacing defective genes with beneficial genes.

There are religious footnotes to this tale. According to the Michigan Alumnus magazine, "Some scientists think that some of the Salem witchos may have suffered from Huntington's."

Laurie Jarski, Donna's college student daughter, recalls that the onset of her mother's illness started in her 20s, and that people at first thought Donna was mentally ill. Donna's father died of a similar disorder that people associated with the devil. It was all genetic.

Will this be enough to shake the religious right out of badmouthing Darwin, evolution and genetics and insisting on the scientific status for creationism? Let us pray it does.

# Questions weigh heavily when death is at issue

It wasn't the first time I was forced to put an animal to sleep. Just last fall our 12-year-old cat had fallen suddenly, violently ill. Now it was Ginger, our 20-year-old Golden Retriever. That's right, a record-setting age, according to our Southfield veterinarian.

Like with the cat, Ginger was ill. But her illness was progressive, and I had a choice: I could wait, letting her linger and progressively become worse, or I could end her ordeal quickly.

It wasn't pretty. She had difficulty in hearing that started years ago. Several weeks ago, she went blind. Then came failure to eat, followed by failure to drink. The vet advised that her breath indicated something going sour internally.

Still, I could have waited. Some people do, the vet added. But a good life deserves a good death, I reasoned, and I wished dignity for her. Even dogs have that right.

The decision wasn't immediate. There was a two-week interval between assessments at the clinic. It was a difficult choice for me and our trusted veterinarian, who really was counseling me as much as treating the dog.

Yet there was an intense sense of loss and guilt after it was over. I wondered if that was what it felt like to have an abortion or assist in a suicide, and asked myself if there was something more I could have done.

The answers were obvious, but my personal situation — and a letter from a Livonia reader — made me question my beliefs on abortion and assisted suicide a little more critically.

The reader asked why, if the pro-choice movement truly reflected its name, it didn't support measures to allow women access to information on about abortion alternatives and a time delay to think about an irrevocable procedure. The pro-choice movement does support women making choices, but it opposes waiting periods as an unwarranted delay that could prevent some women from having abortions.

Ultimately, the question is: Does anyone have the right to intervene in a personal, private matter?

That question is repeated as members of the medical and legal establishments don't quite know what to do with Dr. Jack Kevorkian, also known



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as Dr. Death for his assisted suicides. Does he truly provide counseling as he says he does? Is he qualified to make judgments on a person's level of health and quality of life?

I remember my mother, who died of cancer, at home, nearly 20 years ago. She had become so ill, so paralyzed, that the only things she still had control over moving were her always expressive eyes and eyebrows.

Does a good life warrant a good death with dignity for people, too, and how can that be achieved? Another doubt surfaced as I recalled my mother's death, something that had provided more relief than sorrow for the family. But had she committed suicide, would we still have had a chance for the final "I love you" that ended a mother-daughter struggle of some years duration?

Now the answers are becoming a little less clear cut.

And for those of you who by now are outraged, I recognize that there is no comparison between a dog and a human life. But whether it's having a dog put to sleep, having an abortion or participating in an assisted suicide, the decision is not to be made lightly, without thought to consequences.

Just as my veterinarian helped me make my choice, it seems that some kind of counseling is appropriate when considering such matters. Otherwise, western civilization would regress without regard for the majesty of life.

Reaching a decision ought not be murderous.

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