POINTS OF VIEW

As Dorothy said: 'There's no place like home'

Don't you just love to vote?

I don't mean only making the choices. But the whole process.

I love going to Doherty Elementary in West Bloomfield where I've voted for more than 20 years. It's where I used to go with a 3-year-old clinging to my legs, as I ducked behind the curtain of the old-style voting booth.

I love seeing my neighbors — the ones I know by name and even those I only know by nod — as we pass walking, jogging, biking or roller blading (them not me) around the neighborhood. And I even feel a comaraderie — a common purpose — with those I don't know at all.

Our most recent trip to the polls — March 15 — when Prop A won bigtime, came at a crucial time for me.

After two weekends of "condo-hunting" my husband and I were about to decide on whether to stay in our house and update it or move to an in-town Birmingham or woodsy West Bloomfield condo.

A move is a decision we all will consider as our children grow up and out of the house. The empty bedrooms and "kids' bathroom" remain sort of at half mast — with the leftovers from their teen years still in the dresser drawers and posters and bumper stickers still pasted on walls.

And the olive green sinks and matching tub (I think they used to call that avocado) are strictly '70s — when that was a hot color for bathrooms and kitchens.

But it isn't just the kids' part of the house that doesn't measure up. The walk-in bedroom closet which seemed quite enormous when we moved in is a fraction of the size of the "his and hers" walk-ins we saw in new housing today.

JUDITH DONER BERNE

■ When you go through this rite of passage, expect that your kids will go into shock. 'Why would you move from "our house",' says one daughter, from the comfort of her own.

And it goes without saying, there's no whirlpool built into a tub in our bathroom. In fact, there's no tub at all.

When you go through this rite of passage, expect that your kids will go into shock. Why would you move from "our house'," says one daughter, from the comfort of her own.

"It won't be coming 'home'," whines the New York daughter who visits maybe twice a year — but fully expects her room to remain as she left it.

Still, I hear what they say. There's something to preserving family history by maintaining a sense of home, neighborhood and community built up over the years.

Meanwhile, back at the polls, I spent a few minutes catching up with election worker Ann Beuerle whose kids went to school with mine — and with Fran Dennwetz, a former tennis partner, who's a member of the West Bloomfield school board.

You might say that experience at the polls pushed me over the edge. Yes, we're staying put.

Judith Doner Berne is managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can reach her at 901-2563. Empty nesters and their adult children might enjoy the Birmingham Village Players production of "Alone Together," a comedy about a couple whose adult children do keep coming back to the nest. It's April 1-2. Call 644-2075 for ticket information.

Parents need to be kept informed of child's performance

QUESTION: Overall our school district and its programs are excellent. But I have a complaint. Why is it some teachers don't inform parents early in the school year when their child isn't doing what he is supposed to be doing? Our 10th grade son failed a class the first marking period of the school year and we didn't find out until we received his report card. We called the school but the teacher didn't return the call. We are not blaming the school for his lack of effort. But aren't there any phones in the school? This is not right!

ANSWER: I agree! Parents have a legitimate right to be kept informed and notified immediately if there is any sudden or unusual change in school performance or behavior by their child.

As a first-year teacher of science and math in the Grosse Ile School District, a community with many professional people, I learned that lesson fast. I was having the typical first-year teacher problems; that is, kids working on your head to see if you are for real. And, as a result, some students were not performing as well as their potential and past performance would indicate. It was my fault as much as their fault.

Nevertheless, my first six-week report cards went home with some solid B students getting C(s), some "A" students getting B(s), C students getting D(s) and a few students failed for lack of effort and for disrupting the class.

I was blown away at my first parent-teacher conference trying to justify how I could lower a student grade because of poor classroom behavior. Parents, rightly so, pointed out that the class performance and behavior were separate issues.

Most of these parents were kind and reasonable; a few saw an opportunity to create a scapegoat for their own lack of control over their child. But all clearly indicated to me they wanted to be informed in a timely fashion . . . not after the fact. These parents were right. I was dead wrong. And devastated! But not stupid.

The solution that came to me was so simple. A written progress report; not used much back in the late 60s. A report that would go out after the first three weeks of the school year or anytime a parent needed to be notified of a child's performance.

The standard form I developed was very simple, very objective, saying:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones:

You should be aware that your son John:

DOC DOYLE

■ I was blown away at my first parent-teacher conference trying to justify how I could lower a student grade because of poor classroom behavior. Parents, rightly so, pointed out that the class performance and behavior were separate issues.

(1)Has not been turning in homework

2)Failed the last test (and other items).

One or both would be checked. The parent response was most positive.

But "Oh . . . those little devils. Some kids soon caught on and intercepted any letter to their parent in a school envelope to see if it was from Doyle. So, re-grouping, I sent the letter out in a plain envelope. But they recognized my handwriting. So typing the name and address of the parents became a necessity. But then they checked all letters with no return address . . . and some kids were "steaming" letters open. What creativity!

I got nicknames like the mailman (and others that I won't mention). Being tenacious, letters were sent to the office where the husband or mother worked and then the victory was mine.

But something was lacking. My focus was totally on negative aspects. So I decided to "accentuate the positive."

Another form letter was developed as a follow-up. This form letter said something like: "I would like to take this opportunity to tell you how much your daughter has improved in my class. Her homework, attention to task, test scores, behavior, attitude (whatever) has greatly improved and it is a pleasure to have her in my class."

The feedback from parents was amazing. People want teachers and building administrators to be open and caring; caring about their child.

And the teacher not returning a phone call is unexcusable. If teacher contracts in Michigan weren't so powerful, that teacher should be suspended without pay for a reasonable amount of time. But please, first call back and check to see if a student aide took the message and dropped the ball. Principals and building secretaries I knew simply do not let this happen.

One of the worst scenarios I ever experienced was as the new assistant superintendent in a quality Michigan school district. It was an October parent-teacher conference in the high school gymnasium. I shook the hand of a supportive parent. He and his wife sat down in front of the teacher. The parent asked, "How is my kid doing?" The teacher said, "He failed this first marking period. You will be getting the report card tomorrow."

Totally insane! Parents have a right to know and a progress report should be standard operating procedure. Hey, even my gas station tells me when I'm low on oil . . . before the engine is blown away.

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