

POINTS OF VIEW

We all suffer from offensive yearbook slurs

It doesn't matter whether you graduated five or 50 years ago, you probably still have your class yearbook. That first summer out of high school it may well have stayed on your night table, the ever-ready-to-mull-over, tangible record of your high school days that were so abruptly over.

In a way, it was a sort of security blanket to bridge that scary period between high school and the next phase of life.

As you made your way in the world, you kept it with you as part of that precious pack of keepsakes that defined you as a person. Later, it became a handy reference before those 10-year reunions or whenever you came across the name or face of a classmate you couldn't quite place.

As your children will tell you, the haircuts date your era. (Oh Mommy! Look at Daddy!) And for you, the handwritten messages from classmates couldn't quite place.

But two students at one of our finest local high schools ruined that yearbook experience for their entire class when each encoded a racial slur in the Lahser Class of '96 yearbook. By doing so, they made turning its pages forever hurtful for black students who make up about 8 percent of the school. They made the book forever distressing for other minorities who attend Lahser. And they made it forever humiliating for the white student majority.

The messages were written backward in a section where students compose farewell remarks using codes and slang. On a page full of teen jargon, they escaped the scrutiny of school officials who now say that section of the book will be eliminated for future classes.

The two racist insults were discovered by DeShawn Rogers and a friend who were going through a yearbook soon after it was distributed to the senior class.



JUDITH DONER BERNE

Two students at one of our finest high schools ruined the yearbook experience for their entire class when each encoded a racial slur in the yearbook.

An irony is that one of the responsible students was on a field trip to the Holocaust Memorial Center in West

Bloomfield when school officials learned of the incident and tried to contact him. A further irony is that the school they attend, part of the Bloomfield Hills school district, was one of the first school systems in Oakland County to set up multi-cultural education for staff and students.

Lahser High School has an exchange program with Detroit's Martin Luther King Jr. High School. It offers an annual retreat and weekly issues groups. And Bloomfield Hills also is one of the few public school systems in the country to require students to perform community service in order to graduate.

DeShawn's dad, Dr. Eugene Rogers, a vice president of the North Oakland County NAACP Chapter, calls most of the school's programs window dressing that can't change attitudes. These two students prove him right. But the outcry from their classmates says otherwise. So does the outrage from every corner.

The Bloomfield Hills school officials acted swiftly, barring the two from classes, final exams and graduation events. Their grades will reflect failing to take finals, which could come into play as the colleges they will attend check their final grades.

Stories and editorials in local, state and national press have decried their actions.

The parents of both students were devastated by what they did, one promising their son will receive counseling, according to the Lahser principal.

Dr. Rogers says, "This is not just offensive to my son, but to all black people."

And a community affirms: This is offensive to us all.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former editor of the West Bloomfield Excentric. You can leave her a message from a Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1997.

Powers that be missing bus on transportation

Transportation is supposed to move people from place to place, to where they need or want to go. It is supposed to be the link between cities, making it possible for people to have an intermingling civilization.

Big business and government agencies have delved into how public transportation should be handled. The powers that be that make the decisions appear to be the typical "bean counters" of the business world. They have totally forgotten who and why a public transportation system should serve.

A comparison of getting around in the metro area in the 1950s and the 1990s is like comparing day and night.

In the 1950s the area was served by three major systems: the DSR in Detroit, the green buses of Greyhound Suburban, and the blue of the Downriver Suburban Line. There was also

intercity rail transportation to the northern suburbs and to the Ann Arbor areas.

No extensive schedules were needed for the buses which ran on a continual basis. If you missed one, you could feel confident another would soon be coming. On those lines that were not quite as extensively used, it was still possible to check posted schedules and know when the next was to be expected.

The drivers were congenial and helpful. They took pride in their jobs and came to know their regular passengers. The routes were many and easy to reach. It was not necessary to have a car to get to public transportation.

But then the 1960s came, and changes were fast and furious. Gone were not only the middle-of-the-road street cars but even their electric-

GUEST COLUMNIST



SHIRLEY WELCH

wheeled bus replacements. The unthinking policy makers ordered bigger buses and cut schedules. They foolishly thought one bus carrying more people was a wiser move. They forgot the whole purpose of why the systems were created — to get people moved about the city.

As a result of the changes many people could not keep jobs far from their homes for if they missed a bus the hour's wait for the next would make it impossible to reach their work site at a reasonable time to please a boss and keep the job. The distance between routes made it almost impossible to reach a bus without having a ride in a car to the bus line.

At the beginning of these changes, a wise man in the automotive industry (Bob Irving, a newspaper writer) was strongly advocating an extension of public train service. He had suggested a plan for making use of existing but unused tracks to make public transportation more available and faster in the growing metro area. No one paid any attention.

As the years went by, more and more bus routes were combined and/or canceled. As a result of these front office

decisions people found bus transportation less and less a reliable source of mobility. Those who could not drive or could not afford cars, found themselves unable to obtain and keep jobs.

We do not need bigger buses and routes. The public needs more "feeder" lines and more frequent buses. The small SMART buses more than answer that problem. After all, if someone has to drive a person a distance to catch a bus, then car transportation (which unfortunately for some is not an option) would become the only public transportation. Flexible times and routes must be considered if public transportation is really being sought.

Guest columnist Shirley Welch of Livonia is a retiree who cannot drive and depends on public transportation or friends with cars for mobility.

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