

OBSERVATION POINT

Our Children: High Accomplishment, Shocking Statistics On Runaways



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

Kids made much of the news here in the suburbs over the weekend. Much of it was very good news, too.

In Southfield, teenagers Gary Dembs, Mike Gordon and John Levy were pedaling their bikes furiously in the area of 10 Mile and Greenfield, hoping to raise \$100 for multiple sclerosis.

Riding in hour and a half shifts to gain contributions from interested adults, the youths are continuing this year the 36-hour bike ride that last year netted \$50 for the March of Dimes.

In Farmington, the feasts of Steven Ballmer were spread before the public eye. A 17 year-old graduate of Detroit Country Day School, Ballmer is a recipient of a \$1,000 National Merit Scholarship, a participant in the U.S.A. Mathematical Olympiad, a Phi Beta Kappa, and a member of his school's varsity football and track teams. He was characterized by Harvard College, which looked over his academic record and informed him he didn't even have to go through his freshman year; he'll enter this fall as a sophomore.

In Livonia, a young singing group from Frost Junior High School, the Tudor Singers, are making plans to attend the International Musical Eisteddfod in Llangollen, Wales, next summer.

Open to young singers from seventh through ninth grades, the

group has received a superior rating every year since its foundation from the Michigan School Vocal Association choir and glee club competition.

Henry Naasko, who directs the group, says that a community-wide fund raising effort is underway to help his charges get the money to make the trip.

THESE NEWS ITEMS — just a sampling of a deluge of interesting stories about suburban youngsters — are important indications that despite all the griping about long hair and rock music and suspicions about different life styles, our kids are doing some pretty wonderful things these days.

The pursuit of excellence. The acceptance of sweat and diligence in this pursuit. The concern for the sick and the unfortunate. The willingness to accept challenges.

All these characterize the attitudes of young people today, and they make reading the news a pleasure rather than an exercise in ulcers.

BUT THERE WAS a dark side to this week's news of children here in the suburbs.

It was the story from Farmington that James Manrog had discovered a little baby boy abandoned in a garbage can outside the X-Way Car Wash on Grand

River. Police estimate that the little boy had been dumped just a few hours after he had been born last week.

The baby, named John Doe, is doing well at Botsford General Hospital.

True, but it doesn't hide the fact that someone just threw away a baby — a human being — into a garbage can, like a hamburger wrapper or a beer can by the side of the road.

Maybe the problem is less with the kids and more with some parents.

ALL OF WHICH brings to mind the shocking story of the homosexual group in a suburb of Houston which seems to have tortured, abused and then murdered over 30 young boys.

How everybody wondered, could such things have been going on without the police knowing? How could over 30 kids have disappeared without anxious parents blowing the whistle?

Asked about this, Houston police authorities replied that there were so many missing children reported that 30 boys more or less didn't make much difference.

This led members of this newspaper to check with local police officials about the number of kids who disappear — called missing juveniles on police reports — in our own local communities.

THE RESULTS WERE striking.

In Livonia in 1972, 281 boys and 154 girls were reported missing; so far this year, the figures show 58 boys and 71 girls. Farmington police list 13 juveniles missing in 1972, all of whom were found; Farmington Hills showed 44 during a comparable period.

Redford Township registered 135 boys and 120 girls missing in 1972, with 59 boys and 56 girls reported lost so far this year. Garden City had 216 runaway-missing reports in 1972, with all but three accounted for; the figures for 1973 are 166 missing and five unaccounted for. Westland police reported that all local runaways were eventually recovered or returned on their own, but that there were 526 such cases reported in 1972.

Families in Plymouth reported 24 missing juveniles in 1972, of which 21 were recovered. Southfield police report that in all the history of the department only one person has not been found after being reported missing; in 1972, there were 170 missing juvenile reports filed.

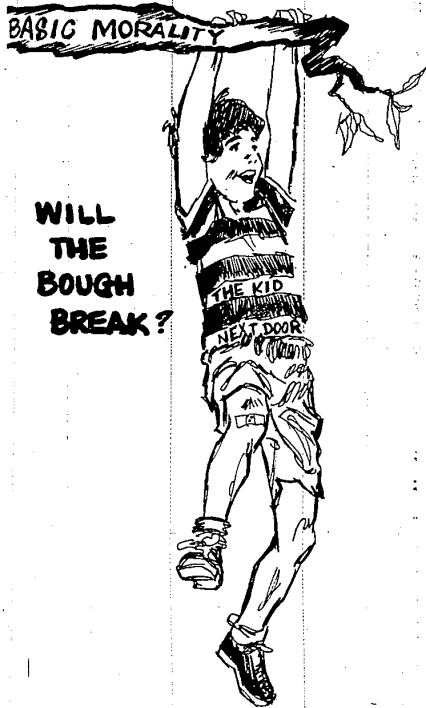
What all this means is somewhat unclear. Kids may leave home in a fit of pique, only to return after a day or so; some reports of missing juveniles, police report, are filed by excessively

anxious parents. Most children reported as missing eventually returned.

But the base fact is clear: In 1972, a total of 1683 reports of missing juveniles was filed with police authorities in these affluent northwest suburbs. That's one very large number of children

who decided to split, if only for a little while.

And it raises the question of just what kind of society are we building in which we find simultaneously such outstanding examples of achievement in some of our kids and such shocking statistics of runaways in others. It's well worth pondering.



Editorial & Opinion

When Will Cyclists Stop Breaking Laws?

Summer is nearing the end for 1973 and that means to police officers of the area the traffic problem created by the thousands of bike riders will become more acute as the days get shorter.

Makes no difference where one turns in the seven communities in the northwest suburbs, motorists are loud in their protests over the careless manners of the cyclists.

A recent check with each of our editors revealed that all police departments are being swamped with calls from motorists about near-misses with bikes at busy intersections.

Merriman and Schoolcraft in Livonia, Beech and Plymouth in Redford Township, various intersections of busy Ford Road in Garden City and Westland, Harvey and Ann Arbor Trail in Plymouth, Grand River and Farmington in the City of Farmington, Orchard Lake and 11-Mile Road in Farmington Hills, and Evergreen and 12-Mile Road in Southfield — all these are busy intersections where motorists report youngsters driving through red lights and practically forcing oncoming drivers to stand on their heads to get their cars

stopped before striking one of the careless cyclists.

Only the fact that police officers haven't cracked down on violators has kept the districts courts from having more cases on the docket than at any previous period in history.

The fact that 13,800,000 bikes were sold nation-wide a year ago against 10 million cars is a major reason for the record number of violations...that and the failure of some bike riders to follow the state laws, local ordinances and generally disregard all safety rules.

Livonia already has one fatality in a car-bicycle accident. There could have been many more judging from the meager reports from area hospitals about injury accidents. There have been so many that police and hospitals can't keep up.

All summer there have been reports of cyclists riding against traffic, not riding in single file as required, moving along at night without proper lights and reflectors and riding in groups spread across the highway.

With the big Labor Day weekend just ahead, area police chiefs anticipate more bicycles on the

road than ever before. They warn it is the responsibility of both the cyclist and the motorist to observe the rules of the road.

"Motorists should give cyclists a brake and a break," says Livonia Chief Robert Turner. "With a little cooperation we may be able to get through the big three-day holiday with a minimum of accidents."

"It is the final chance for students to have their last fling of the vacation and they must be cautioned to take greater care than ever if they plan any bike trips. We hope that all are on the list in classes after Labor Day and not on a list of fatalities or accident victims."

Turner serving as spokesman for all of the area police departments strongly recommends use of the following revised bicycle rules of the road:

- (1) Obey all applicable traffic regulations, signs, signals and markings. A good rule: of the thumb is to avoid congested streets and use bikeways, lanes or paths where possible.
- (2) Inasmuch as there is a decided shortage of bikeways and lanes in Observerland, then it is advisable to ride only on roads where traffic is light.
- (3) Observe all local ordinances pertaining to bicycles. Registration, and licensing, inspection, driving on sidewalks etc. are all covered by local laws. It is your responsibility to know and abide by them.
- (4) Keep right, drive with traffic, not against it. Drive single file. Keep as close to the curb as practical. When riding two abreast, a sudden swerve could force you into traffic.
- (5) Watch out for drain grates, soft shoulders and other road surface hazards. Be careful of loose sand or gravel, particularly at corners.
- (6) Watch out for car doors opening or for cars pulling into traffic.
- (7) Don't carry passengers or packages that interfere with your vision or control. The best rule is one person to one bike unless it's a tandem. Use baskets or luggage carriers for packages.
- (8) Never hitch a ride on a truck or other vehicle.
- (9) Be extremely careful at intersections, especially when mak-

ing a left turn. If traffic is heavy get off and walk your bike with pedestrian traffic.

- (9) Use hand signals to indicate turning or stopping.
- (10) Protect yourself at night with the required red reflectors and lights.
- (11) Ride a safe bike. Make sure your bike fits you.
- (12) Drive your bike defensively; watch out for the other guy.

Jim Richard writes

SR Board Thinking Is Wrong

Even in good times, schools have troubles, and a couple of Observerland districts are treating us to examples of the wrong way to handle problems.

In South Redford, the school board is figuring out how to cut \$730,000 from the current year's budget if voters on Sept. 8 again reject a three mill property tax hike.

Now, to some extent you've got to feel sorry for the SR board. Every year the Legislature's school aid formulas give less and less to relatively rich districts, and this year SR's state aid will be zero.

Enrollment has leveled off and is even shrinking, and it's tough to cut overhead. So if the millage gets beaten, the board figures it will have to shut down three elementary schools.

Which three? Well, the board hasn't made that tough decision. Unfortunately, the board seems intent on making that decision behind closed doors.

Why closed doors? Board President Richard Guegrian says he's afraid advance publicity would lead to possible real estate depreciations. Honest; I'm not making that up. Redford Observer Editor Chuck Varkoly, a sober, precise fellow, heard him.

A journalistic rule of thumb is to "stick to the facts," at least in the news columns. An old pro in this business once confessed, "I've told the public more lies by sticking to the facts..." That's why newspapers have editorial

pages: To get away from "facts" and tell the truth.

It's a fact that Board President Guegrian says publicity could cause property value losses. It's also sheer nonsense.

The truth is that the SR board, like many in Observerland, likes secrecy and doesn't like the voters and taxpayers breathing down its neck. Evidence shows it likes to hold rehearsals and concoct rationalizations rather than confront the public like a group of adults, lay it on the line and take the knocks it will probably get.

The school boards association has a canned "line" it gives in defense of secret meetings — they're OK to discuss delicate personnel matters, labor negotiations, real estate acquisitions and the like. Well, not even that thin line of reasoning will support a secret meeting on what schools the SR board should close if the millage is beaten.

Harry Truman used to say, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." The SR board would be well advised and would earn more public respect if it made its tough decisions in the open.

Tim Dyer, the new superintendent of the Wayne-Westland district, is following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Harry Howard, who was an able administrator but who had a loose tongue politically.

Dyer was unhappy that Gov. Milliken vetoed an item in the state aid act that would have

brought Wayne-Westland an extra \$2 million, enabling it to cut its property tax rate a bit. (Actually, WWSD won't have to raise its tax rate, as SR will; but it won't be able to cut its operating rate, which is in the neighborhood of 40 mills.)

Well, if you were superintendent in Wayne-Westland, you'd be as unhappy as Tim Dyer — but would you call the veto "tragic"?

Very doubtful. Tragic means fatal; the hero in a Grecian or Shakespearean tragedy generally died. Tragic means catastrophic, calamitous, pathetic.

Is the governor's veto a tragedy? It's not going to require any additional millage. Milliken vetoed that item because he didn't want to mess up the budget after he and the Legislature gave us all a \$380 million tax cut.

Perhaps Supt. Dyer wants the governor to save the money someplace else — like less care for our mental patients and the retarded, no improvements in prison conditions, no Applied Science Building addition for Schoolcraft College. If so, it's a reasonable point of view, whether the rest of us agree with it or not.

But "tragic"? That's verbal overkill. That's like the boy who cried "wolf" promiscuously. One of these days, the wolf may really be at the Wayne-Westland District's door. What will Supt. Dyer cry then?

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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