

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

In keeping with my desire to raise the cultural level of this page (and that of my readers) again some light verse:

*Men seldom make passes,
At girls who wear glasses.
If you thought, "Dorothy Parker" you'd have been right.
Those rather famous lines, penned some 50 years ago by Mrs. Parker, may never die, unless contacts take over completely, which I am assured is not very likely.*

Another:
*A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet -
One perfect rose.
I knew the language of the floweret;
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."*

Parker was one perfect rose

*Love long has taken his amulet
One perfect rose.
Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get*

One perfect rose.
Alexander Wolcott wrote: "I think it not unlikely that the best of Mrs. Parker's work will be conned a hundred years from now. If so, I can foresee the plight of some undergraduate in those days being maddened by an assignment to write a thesis on what manner of woman the dead and gone Dorothy Parker really was. Was she a real woman at all? He will naturally want to know. And even if summoned from out tombs, we will not be sure how we should answer that question."

As for me, I wouldn't even try. (Dorothy herself simply said, "I'm just a little Jewish girl trying to be cute.") Let it be enough to say she was one of a group of writers who helped editor Harold Ross found the great *New Yorker* (at least it was great then). She wrote short stories, reviewed plays and produced light, satirical verse. And of course, those cutting remarks...
Like: A woman said, "I can't come to your party, I can't bear fools," so Mrs. Parker replies,

"That's strange, your mother could."

And: Clare Booth Luce drew Dorothy's hatred of pretense. When told that Mrs. Luce was always kind to her inferiors, Mrs. Parker asked, "Where does she find them." And once they arrived at a nightclub door at the same time, Mrs. Luce bravely saying, "Age before beauty." Mrs. Parker swept by saying, "And pearls before swine."

And: "You can lead a horticulture but you can't make her think." I've read Erma Bombeck, who is very funny but she is a columnist, and the others who try to be funny and aren't, and I've yet to find Mrs. Parker's equal. She did not have a very good life, ending at 74 a bitter and alcoholic recluse with several suicide attempts behind her. You could see them coming.

One poem, "Resume" was prophetic:

*Razors pain you
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful
You might as well live.*

We're glad you did, Dorothy Parker.

J.W.J.



John W. Johnson

While much of what we do and say suggests otherwise, the reality is that perfection is an illusion.

Still, the quest for perfection continues. Perhaps, and because it is at the root of our societal values, the most sought after perfection is our pursuit of educational excellence...a laudable goal, if the illusion is understood for what it is, and the 'best we can be' is an acceptable substitute.

However, even that laudable goal falls short of even an illusion of perfection when looking at our public education system. Indeed, we continue perpetuation of the illusion that quality (as opposed to quantity) can be achieved through public education.

This contradiction begins with the perfection declared in this nation's Declaration of Independence...that all are created equal. All are not created equal. And it is charitable to even suggest that all are even remotely equal. All humans are born with different strengths and weaknesses. That's empirically self-evident. But in pursuit of the notion that public education is among the principal sources of strength in a republican democracy, we nevertheless perpetuate the illusion of perfection; we have institutionalized the idea of perfection to the point where, among other things, young people com-

Public education can avoid institutionalized mediocrity

mit suicide over bad grades.

A further misadventure into the quest for perfection is that—and instead of learning these issues at home—public schools now try to deal with issues affecting personal behavior and/or social interaction, i.e., the teaching of ethics.

As such, I'm reminded of the writer John Steinbeck who said in *Cannery Row*:

"The things we admire most in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first, they love the produce of the second."

We teach word and deed that striving for success is worthy, and then denigrate the very qualities which, within our system, achieve success. As such, a fraud is being committed upon the intelligence of the entire nation as we mouth rhetoric about quests for perfection/excellence, and turn a blind eye and deaf ear to the mediocrity our educational system is actually producing.

This happens because parents don't want to be told their children are not doing well; parents want to hear exactly the opposite, because parents have bought into this cockeyed notion of perfection.

The fraud is most apparent to those who must try and teach beginning college students; students who are woefully unpre-

pared to do college level work because those students were cushioned from reality in primary education by something called "grade inflation", a reducing of standards to the point where a former D is now a B.

Looking at the numbers makes this clear; high school students nationally score a B average, and yet only five percent of high school students can do college level math, and only 40 percent have college level verbal and cognitive skills.

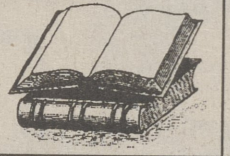
Somebody is lying to somebody here. And it's clearly the nation's educators and parents in a mutual self congratulation society, while the rest of the world not only is maintaining higher primary education standards, but also doesn't don the robes of an ill-conceived idea about perfection in developing and maintaining those standards.

Given our inequality as humans, public education, by definition, and in order to in fact be public, must tailor its product to the least common denominator.

Still, the rhetoric for perfection continues while the reality of mediocrity grows. And while there is something to be said for public education being a strength in our republican democracy, it must also be said that without high standards expected by parents and executed by educators, there is no choice but to see the educational emperor for what he is.

Naked.
Naked, while the minds of our children are freezing to death in the intellectual hand-me-downs of institutionalized mediocrity.

LIBRARY NEWS



By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The 'Guess the number of pennies in the jar contest' at the Back Mountain Memorial Library came to an end on March 31. The total amount of pennies in the jar was 2,036; which surprised many of us. There were more than 150 entries in the contest. The first place winner was Yvonne Marshall who guessed 2,045; just nine pennies more than the total. We gave prizes to winners. Sara Swepston, Grace Ciak and Matthew Ford all guessed 2,001; Maria Stevens, Sherry Riley, Melissa Novitski, Jackie Lowe and Chrissy Carboni all guessed 2,000; and John Patnos guessed 2,100. This jar filled with pennies was donated to the

Marshall guesses correct number of pennies in jar

library by a patron, for which we are very grateful. The jar has been cleaned out and ready to be used again.

The month of March was the 'Pennies for Periodicals' campaign for our green jar donations. The total received for that project was \$36.30. The green jar project is an on-going container which accepts bills and coins for special library projects, a 'Friends of the Library' membership campaign.

New large print books at the library: "Morality Play" by Barry Unsworth is the story of a young priest Nicholas Barber, fearing the bishop's wrath for breaking his vows of chastity, he takes up with a group of traveling players in plague ridden 14th century England.

"This Same River Twice" by Alice Walker is a book composed of selected entries from the author's

journals, letters and essays. It chronicles her transition from recluse to public figure following her success.

"Legacies" by Janet Dailey is a novel of history and emotion and also a glorious love story of a man and a woman divided by individual loyalties struggling to find one another again in a time of turmoil and upheaval.

"Home Fires" by Luanne Rice is a powerful and moving novel; with a sharp eye for details of daily life, the eccentricities of ordinary people and the major dramas that both divide families and bind them together.

"Hunter's Moon" by Karen Robards is about a spirited young woman with a painful past and a lonely but determined FBI agent, that ignites this riveting new novel of romantic suspense, including bloodshed and terror.

THANKS

Thanks for egg hunt support, and a vow to do better

Editor:
The Back Mountain Business Association would like to thank all those who volunteered to help out with the Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 6th. A special thank you to Penn State, Lehman for use of their grounds and area Back Mountain businesses that donated prizes.

We would also like to extend

our appreciation to all the parents and children who showed up to participate in the egg hunt, our first ever. We were gratified and overwhelmed by the level of interest the event created. We also, however, share the disappointment of some knowing that even one child might not have enjoyed the event as much as we had hoped. As a result, of the turnout

we are quite aware of the tremendous interest that such events can create within the community. And we are committed to ensuring that the second annual Easter Egg Hunt in 1997 is a "smashing success". Thank you again for your interest and support.

Mary Ellen Giannuzzi
Chairperson
BMBPA Egg Hunt Committee

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