

EDITORIALS

Teen agers give a lesson on citizen involvement

Whether or not they get a public place to ride their skateboards, a group of Back Mountain teens has learned a valuable lesson in political action. They have set an example for adults as well.

Faced with a problem, Joe Fritz, age 13, along with his friends Anthony Yenason, Jared Flower, Adam Reggie and others chose to respond not by muttering complaints to one another but by taking appropriate action. Facing a pending ban on their favorite after-school activity, they held a petition drive, gathered other support and attended the Sept. 17 meeting of the Dallas Borough Council. Council members, impressed with the teens' diligence, decided to put off adopting an ordinance that would have made the sport illegal on public property, and to consider a boarding area at Burndale Park, an idea the boys proposed. Now it is up to the council to come up with a response equal to the thoughtfulness demonstrated by the teens.

This was a refreshing occasion in local government. Instead of whining about the unfairness of government, a group of ordinary citizens used their democratic freedoms to begin the search for a solution to a problem. The skateboarders rejected the notion of becoming victims to become actors — people who take positive steps when faced with an obstacle and in the process often come up with an entirely different, and better, result.

Speaking of ordinary citizens, that's also what the members of the Dallas Borough Council and every other local government body are. They just happen to be citizens who choose not to sit on the sidelines of their municipalities, but to devote their time and talents to making their towns better places in which to live and work. They deserve credit, too, for listening to the teens, concerns and agreeing to look for a compromise between the extremes of a skateboard ban and skateboard anarchy.

We need more of this type of citizen involvement if we are to remain an open society. People who cower and whisper behind the scenes or express their venom anonymously serve to tear down our nation. Those who attend public meetings, volunteer for service — or even write a letter to the editor — build up community life in the Back Mountain and around the United States.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Teachers and their union are again in the news, and it brings back thoughts of my days in elementary school. I can't imagine the teachers of that ancient time walking picket lines, despite the fact that they were severely underpaid. Nor can I remember politicians or other authority figures casting aspersions at the teaching fraternity (or is it sorority, since the field is predominantly female?). Teachers may have had to take summer jobs to get by, but they were held in high esteem. To me, they were in the same league as doctors or lawyers, although I don't remember there being so many of either of those professions when I was young.

One of my grade school friends was the son of a teacher. I would occasionally visit Pat Abbe's modest house, which sat only a hundred yards or so from the school, and was surprised that it wasn't nearly as neat as my own. But there was interesting stuff all over the place, including a grumpy boxer dog in the back yard whose favorite toy was an old bowling ball. I kept my distance, especially after noticing that a chunk was missing near one of the finger holes.

I don't recall what Mr. Abbe taught, but to me he was the symbol of intelligence and what passed for sophistication in our small town. He was also indulgent with his son, a trait I envied more than any other. But regardless of his personal traits, he was a teacher, and that meant someone who deserved respect unless his actions became at odds with his mission. All teachers didn't hold up their end of the bargain, of course. My brother had a math teacher once who outraged parents with his short temper, including one episode when he told his students not to bother coming to school the next day unless they had a particularly difficult homework assignment completed. That demand spawned a flurry of phone calls among parents, mine included.

Incidents like that one didn't tarnish our image of teachers; we understood that one bad apple didn't spoil the barrel. We felt that way in part because the other adults in our lives made sure we understood what school was for, and that teachers were to be obeyed and respected. I'm afraid there are too many parents today who don't support teachers or the mission of schools, and their antipathy combines with a militant union to put teachers at odds with their community instead of being allied with it on a common mission.

I don't know how Mr. Abbe and his associates would feel about his profession in the '90's, but I suspect they would just like to get on with the job. Most current teachers probably feel the same way. At least I hope they do.

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Life's just ducky, and goosey, in Lehman. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

Reporter's notebook



Grace R. Dove

Cloudy weather prevented me from seeing the last full moon lunar eclipse visible this century on Thursday night, but it sure brought back memories of some of my adventures in the wonderful world of astronomy.

The only time I successfully photographed an eclipse was in 1980, when we first moved out to the Back Mountain and before our trailer park got street lights. Grandmother Moon was at the perfect place in the sky, so all I had to do was set up my camera and telephoto on a tripod in the back of our pickup truck.

Naturally the neighbors were curious, so I got out my telescope and a pair of binoculars for them. The hippies next door also wanted to join in the fun, but all they had for close range viewing was the scopes on their deer rifles. I felt rather uncomfortable to be seen in the company of two hippies pointing high-powered rifles at the moon for two hours.

Sky-watching has fascinated me since I was a kid. In 1964 a rumor that UFO's were coming to earth to kidnap all the 14-year-olds (I was one of them) circulated through my high school. I actually volunteered to walk the dog every night so I could look for the Little Green Guys' magic swirling ship.

Tales from years of stellar interest

I really wanted to blow town and this was a golden opportunity.

During my freshman year at Wilkes, I signed up for astronomy and earth science to fulfill a six-credit science requirement. The prof, Dr. Alvan Bruch, required three trips to the observatory for each course, which meant we had to climb four flights of stairs to the roof of Stark Hall and complete assigned projects. He called these excursions "star parties," but to most of the class they weren't much fun.

The day after he assigned the first one, I hiked up the four flights to the roof, met graduate assistant Andy Kasper and immediately fell in love with the telescopes. It wasn't long before I was helping Andy set up the clock drives for two of the three scopes. I also quickly learned to use Dr. Bruch's pride and joy, the small Questar scope. On subsequent visits (I usually did two star parties a week) I learned how to use the weather equipment and sat openmouthed as Andy regaled me with accounts of his UFO sightings (his were much better than mine) and the night a meteor landed on the roof.

We had to complete a card after each visit. Somehow I don't think Dr. Bruch appreciated my diagram of Jupiter's (or was it Saturn's?) moons, with an extra dot labeled "Mistake," or the cryptic comment, "Used Questar to look below Orion's belt." Actually, there's something astronomically interesting below his belt — the Great Nebula, which contains all sorts of fascinating stellar stuff.

Obviously our star parties

weren't all work.

One snowy night my boyfriend and I made a snowman, then toppled it off the roof into the parking lot. Another night we watched a stuffy music major whirl a sling psychrometer (a device which uses a wet-bulb and a dry-bulb thermometer to measure the dew point) so hard that it flew off its handle and sailed across the roof and down into the parking lot. "Is this how you conduct?" I sniffed.

Watching meteor showers was great fun, even when it rained. We had the entire building to ourselves, so when weather prevented us from watching the Perseids we ran around switching room numbers and door signs. Dr. Bruch came in the following morning to find the janitor's sign switched with his.

Astronomy nearly got me in trouble with the police at home in Bloomfield, NJ. I had received a small telescope, which I still have, from my father and stepmother for Christmas my freshman year, and set it up on a step ladder in Brookdale Park to look at the full moon. My eye glued to the eyepiece, I was mumbling names of lunar features when a police car pulled up and the nice officer asked me what I was doing.

"I'm looking at the moon," I said proudly. "I'm taking astronomy in college and I know a lot of neat stuff."

"Yeah, right," he said. Clearly he had heard it before and thought I was a peeping Tom or something.

"Want to take a look?" I fired back.

After looking through my little telescope and learning the names of more lunar features than he probably wanted to, he stepped back and said, "Hey, thanks, lady; I've never seen that before."

My sky-watching has also resulted in one UFO sighting, back in the fall of 1968 during my first semester at Wilkes.

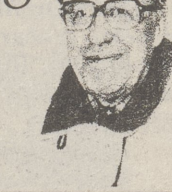
My friend Bill and I were walking my sister's dog on the dike when we spotted a large white light bobbing up and down and wobbling from side to side in the sky over Larksville. It was brighter than Venus. (Bill and I were both cold sober, which itself was a miracle in those days.)

Suddenly a small red light left the bottom of the white light and descended to the ground, followed by a second one. The first little light then returned to the big light. About that time several planes began to buzz the thing, which immediately zoomed straight up and disappeared.

We told Dr. Bruch what had happened and he believed us (after he swore we both were sober.) He said he would report it to Project Blue Book. I still don't know what the thing was, but several other star party freaks later told me they had seen many similar things in the friendly skies over Wilkes-Barre.

The UFO sighting, in turn, led me to a lifelong study of things which can't be explained scientifically, featured on such programs as *The X-Files*, *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Mysterious Universe*. Whether or not you believe in otherworldly things, the truth is certainly out there somewhere.

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

...QUOTE OF THE YEAR: From Groucho Marx. "A hospital bed is a parked taxi with the meter running."

...Another: From Muhammad Ali in *The New York Times*, 1977. "It's just a job. Grass grows, birds fly, waves pound the sand. I beat people up."

...TYPING TESTS: That familiar phrase about the quick brown fox jumping over the lazy dog which you use when trying out a new typewriter is getting a bit shopworn. (It contains, as if you didn't know, every letter of the alphabet.) So here are two new phrases for you to memorize: "Pack my bags with five dozen liquor jugs."

Odds 'n Ends Time (This stuff is piling up again.)

and, "The July sun caused a fragment of black pine wax to ooze on the velvet quilt." (We'll, I think I'll just stick with "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party," even though some letters seem to be missing.)

THE KING'S TASTES: A new book about Elvis Presley gets into his food passions. Like the corn bread soaked in buttermilk he started to eat as a baby and kept up in the service. Then, before a White House visit he wolfed down a dozen honey doughnuts in the cab. He once ate five chocolate sundaes before passing out. Fried squirrel was a favorite. His last supper was cookies and ice cream.

...INTERESTING (?) BOOKS: "Movie Stars in Bathtubs," from David Publishers, containing 156 photographs of movie stars in bathtubs; "The History and Romance of Elastic Webbing," (no comment); "Out of Our Kitchen Closets: Gay Jewish Cooking," from San Francisco (where else?); 150 recipes submitted by the

members, families and friends of a gay and lesbian synagogue (17 of the recipes are for kugel). "I Dream of Woody," William Morrow publisher, presents case histories of 70 people from New York and Los Angeles who have dreamed about Woody Allen; and finally, (sigh of relief) "The One-Leg Resting Position" which relates cultures in which people rest while standing by placing one foot on the knee of the other foot. Photos from Africa, Sri Lanka, Romania, Australia and Bolivia.

...POP SONG which you couldn't sing today without bringing down the wrath of Greeks everywhere: "Yes, We Have No Bananas," from the 20's would be politically incorrect today, for it mocks the broken English of a Greek-American fruit-stand owner.

...IN HIS AMAZING STORY MAGAZINE starting in the late 30's, editor John Campbell started running parts of L. Ron Hubbard's "DIANETICS," the book with which he started the Church of

Scientology. Last year they ran 26 full-page ads in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* comparing current treatment of Scientologists in Germany to the Holocaust.

Hubbard founded the church in 1954 which now claims over 2300 missions or groups in 107 countries and sales of more than 16 million copies of "Dianetics" in 22 languages. It also reports a total of 116 million copies of all of Hubbard's 333 books in print worldwide. Ron was nothing if not prolific.

I've already declared how I feel about California, so I will close with a statement by one of Hubbard's better-known church members (there are many more) from the movie colony. This one starred in both "Pulp Fiction" and "Get Shorty"...John Travolta. Big John says, "Scientology put me into the big time."

Funny thing is, I like the guy, but I wish he weren't so damned dumb.

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