



## THE EMPTY NEST NEWSLETTER

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"She sobbed & she sighed and a gurgle she gave,  
then plunged herself into the billowy wave...  
Oh willow, tit willow, tit willow!"... W.S. Gilbert  
(adapted!)

# COSMOS BESTOWS BOAT

LISTEN, MY CHILDREN, AND YOU SHALL HEAR A STORY MOST PECULI-EAR!

Minneapolis: 'Twas the middle of summer in '92, and Damaris Jackson was wandering through a deserted mall when in a prominent place she spotted a large boat made completely out of flattened paper milk cartons. The boat was rather on the order of a motor boat. She walked closer, saw a stand, and a sign that said, "GUESS THE NUMBER OF CARTONS IN THIS BOAT," with a list of various prizes for the winners--dinners out, weekends at B&B's, the usual fare. The contest didn't seem to have any gimmicks attached, and Demi had the good feeling that it was a playful sort of event rather than one for material gain. It looked like fun. "So," Demi said, "I'll play this game," and proceeded to count about twenty cartons and then made a ball-park estimate. Next she addressed the boat outloud: "Boat, we are the same thing, you and I, we're both participating members of this Universe, and share the same stuff; therefore I ought to already know how many cartons you're made of." (This, says Demi, was more than the "positive" approach, but the "sure" approach!) She continued to the boat, "I'll choose the first number

that comes into my head." The number 629 promptly popped into her head, and feeling a little foolish, she wrote 629 down, dropped it in the box, went off, and forgot all about it.

A month or so later she received a letter that said she was the owner of a windsurfer (plus one free lesson on how to sail it), and that she was the only one out of 4,000 entrants who had hit the number on the head. She was shocked. "People talk about taking a positive attitude toward the Universe," she told the ENNL Editor, "but it's a little terrifying when it happens!" The boat is a nice model, not the most elementary, but mid-skillful, and should be suitable for several years till she becomes a pro. It's 10' long; for awhile she was climbing back and forth over it in her kitchen, but now it's residing on a high shelf the size of a door in her studio room. The mast, propped in her stairwell, is 15' high.

Demi bought a wetsuit and car-carrier (ever notice how often gifts require further expenditures?) and thus far has only been able to practice falling in--at her lesson the wind was too high. Next spring, she promises, she'll learn.

### MORE NEWS OF DEMI: An art show, 13" BY 13" BY 13

is going to be exhibited at the St. Paul Campus of the U. of Minnesota, Jan. 10-Feb-5, and Demi is the only fiber artist.

She & 12 friends conceived of a show of small pieces, that could travel easily and be seen in small places, such as restaurants. The U. saw the work and

Day-glo sail:  
white, green, pink, purple

the bar you  
hang on, it  
circles

Little window built into sail  
so you can see where you're going

lifejacket

wetsuit

liked it. The brochure reads, "Thirteen local artists have been meeting in a studio in the Midway District of St. Paul for over a year to support each other and explore art issues. The result is this group show. While the subject matter and techniques are diverse and vital, the show is held together by a contemporary sensibility and (cont on p.2)

mast swivels

board

Estimated store price: \$900

## GRANDPA GOES DANCING AT McPHILLIPSES

Cleveland: This late summer Stephanie invited Grandpa to Cleveland for five or so days, where he went through the Cleveland Clinic having his knees and hips assessed. The doctors found nothing they really could do--that he needs to keep exercising and moving his joints, even though they hurt, so he won't lose more mobility. He had a grand time at Stephanie's, and they certainly rolled out the red carpet. Since Gramp now finds a wheelchair so much quicker, safer, and less painful than a walker, they had one for him, and Tom built ramps from the garage to the house level, and a ramp that allowed Gramp to scoot up and down between the living and dining areas, where there's a step. They rented a platform-van that raises and lowers a wheelchair, so he could travel easily. And of course gave him lots of good meals and TLC. (Especially from great-grandsons Sean and Kirstin.) One thing Tom and Steph do is go dancing; they took Gramp along to their group on Friday night, and he enjoyed himself hugely, watching the various dancers and demonstration tangos, etc. Tom and Steph are very good; I've seen videos--and I knew Stephanie paid a lot of her college expenses by winning dance competitions. ... Herewith I print a letter from Wesson Dougan, Grandpa's father; those of you who own YOUR LOVING FATHER will

find it in its pages: Gramp is just starting at Northwestern as a freshman:

Fall, 1921. My Dear Boy Ronald:--

I realize you are laboring to solve one of the problems of life. I trust to your strength of character and manhood to guard against the temptations of the social life you are entering. I will leave it to you when you see immorality and immoral influences coming through the dance to cut it out. Or when you see the dance is taking your time and strength from useful work and clear thinking restrict it or cut it out entirely.

I feel you could be a happier stronger lad if you did not allow this temptation to draw you.

I shall expect you to be careful in the amount of money you spend in this and also the time it takes from school and other work.

There are two courses open to us in this matter. Either to absolutely forbid you to go and enforce the order, or to allow you to go and assist you to guard against the evil influences and help you to come to a strong Christian life. The latter is the course Mama and I have decided to follow.

You are a noble good boy. We love you and are anxious for you to be a good and strong man.

Your loving Father.  
*W. J. Dougan*



-- drawings by Edward Gorey, of course.

**DEMI**, cont'd from P. 1: "and by the thirteen inch by thirteen inch format. Subject matter includes portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, and is expressed in a variety of media using acrylic, fiber, graphite, oil and pastel." Damaris reports that while the artists number 13, the size of the pieces are 13" x 13"; there are actually 30 to 35 pieces in the show. ... Demi is taking a class in Early Ed at the U. of M., starting in January; during the summer she ached a Child Development class that she hardly attended--one reason being that she came out to Lake Itasca! We had a grand time. Her visit overlapped Betsy Irwin's, so these two finally met! -- We hiked all over the Rock Point peninsula & had a picnic -- hiked up to the stream by Buchanan Lodge, twice! -- did Irena's granddaughter Nina took a great swimming, rowing with her & Irena... We picked a gemmely had lots more time together than we've quiet show she'd been in on, at Honeywell well people, not the general public, and to have personal escorts to take them in in her "Contact Dance" group; in being a no more futon making; showing the long



lots of swimming and rowing -- ate at the Cases-shine to Demi, so we did lots of hiking, ton of blueberries -- visited Eva -- and had in ages. She told me about a in Minneapolis. It was for the Honey-when the show opened, the artists had to the exhibit! ... Demi continues nanny 20 hrs. a week; making books; but needles was injuring her elbows,



# Radio Station Flies in Face Of Modernity

NY Times By ALLAN KOZINN Nov 10 '92

At a time when classical-music radio stations around the country are diluting their formats in search of an audience that is young, affluent and not all that committed to the classics, WFMT, a Chicago station that is carried by satellite and cable to many other cities, is taking a heartening step backward.

Dan Schmidt, the general manager of the 41-year-old station, has reversed a recent policy change in which the station began accepting recorded advertising. Until 1990, advertising copy was read live on the air by WFMT's announcers, a charmingly old-fashioned practice long extinct in the world of modern electronic media. On Jan. 1, the station will return to its live-copy policy.

How advertising is to be presented may seem a matter of peripheral concern, particularly at a time when audiences of classical radio stations across the United States are battling a trend toward limiting play lists to a kind of classical Top 40. But since 1987, the station has had an active, often adversarial listeners group, the Friends of WFMT, which counts

## For WFMT in Chicago, classic commercials rejoin classical music.

Chicago Symphony players and the author Studs Terkel (who has had a show on the station for 40 years) among its members. When WFMT began accepting recorded advertisements, the Friends campaigned vigorously against the policy.

The 4,000-member group also vowed not to raise money for WFMT. Although it is a commercial station, WFMT has supplemented its advertising income in recent years by seeking donations from its listeners and selling memberships to the WFMT Fine Arts Circle. Jon Kavanaugh, a spokesman for the station, said the station was trying to raise \$750,000 by June.

"Most of our members were very irritated by the recorded advertising," said Herb Kraus, the Friends' treasurer and a listener since the station started in the early 1950's. "We felt it did not suit the kind of programming the station offered. Other stations carry jazzy advertising, and somehow when we hear it on those stations, we don't mind as much. But WFMT has a special quality that we feel should be preserved."

"We understand their financial concerns, and we don't want to see them fail. So now that they have announced their intention to go back to announcer-read advertising, we're going to help them. We're supporting their fund drive, and we'll all send them money."

Mr. Kavanaugh minimized the effect of the group's pressure on the station's policy.

"We and the Friends of WFMT have always had the same goals," he said. "The difference has been in our thinking about how to achieve them. We began to selectively accept recorded advertising in 1990 because we needed revenue, but our intention was always to return to our original policy. We knew that it was important to listeners. And advertisers who had been with us for 15, 20, 30 years have continued to provide copy for live ads. If there is going to be any fall-off it will be among national advertisers who may not understand why a live-copy policy works for our audience."

For the moment, the Friends group is declaring victory. But some of its members are still wary. There is some dissatisfaction about the handling of the sale of Chicago magazine by the Chicago Educational Television Association, which owns WFMT. The magazine was started to carry the station's program listings, but took on a life of its own. When CETA sold it for about \$17 million, in 1987, the profits did not go to WFMT, but into an endowment fund for the use of both WFMT and the public television station, WTTW. Some of CETA's critics acknowledge that CETA has administered the fund fairly, and that WFMT has benefited from it. But one Friends member recently suggested that if WFMT were given the money directly, it would not have to solicit contributions from its listeners.

Sorry for the screaming. In a P.S. I said that Dan's father was Karl Schmidt of WIS, Eugene Radio, who produced "Earplay" for NPR for 10 years. Said I taught lit + writing at Sangamon State in Spfld, which school has NO music, but

does have a public station that does not run "Pipe Dreams"!

Happy listening, if you can.

Cheers,

JMB



Do you pick up the program from Champaign-Urbana?

Though I highly respect Norman Pellegrini at WFMT, I cannot seem to convince him that the world would not end if he were to include PIPE DREAMS in his schedule. And though Dan Schmidt knows the program, and me, and I think understands its potential, he's been keeping hands-off the programming at WFMT, probably for the best, overall, but I do which Norm would see the light, even if it is a non-commercial production. Maybe if you poke Dan again he can think up some sensitive way to change a mind.

Dear Michael Berone, [of Minnesota Public Radio]

Nov. 10, 1992

Driving from Wisconsin to Springfield, Illinois Sunday night, and listening to WILL Champaign, I thought again that I wanted to write to tell you what a superb program Pipe Dreams is, how interesting and knowledgeable and sensitive your remarks, and how beautifully you deliver them.

I'm not an organist but a cellist. My father-in-law was head of the music department at Beloit College, and a fine organist and choir director; on a sabbatical he joined us where we were students at the U. of Michigan, and studied with Marilyn Mason. It was a pleasure to hear her Sunday.

One of my life's listening highlights: when I was a student at Tanglewood, summer of 1949, I went the first Sunday alone to the service at the local Episcopal Church. I was long accustomed to sitting through postludes for the enjoyment of the music, at the last notes every one gone but me and the organist. This day the service ended, the postlude started, and no one stirred. Every pew was packed, no one left. The postlude was magnificent and unfamiliar. At its end as everyone got up to leave I asked someone why everyone had stayed through the postlude. "Oh," said the stranger beside me, "that was Messiaen, improvising."

Which reminds me that last summer I took a class to England ("British Crime Fact and Fiction") and scheduled in a weekday Evensong at Christ Church, Oxford. Even though we were late getting back to our coach and to the hostel for supper, I was so transfixed at the start of the postlude that I stayed through it. It started deep, dark, blasting and discordant and, as I recall, only a single line of what you could hardly call melody for quite awhile, and at the sub-bottom of the organ. After it was over there were two young men still in the choir stalls where we'd all sat, who looked as though they might be music students. I asked them if they knew the composer (we'd had no printed program) and one answered, "Messiaen." I caught up to the gang at the coach and told my sister, an accomplished violinist, what she'd missed, and she snapped she didn't care who'd composed it, it was still awful!

Which brings me to reading in the NYTimes today that WFMT's general manager Dan Schmidt was returning the station to announcer-read commercials; there was quite a long article on it. So before I left school tonight I called my sister's son Dan, my nephew, on our WATS line to hear how things were going up there in Chicago. They raised \$60,000 today, their blockbuster, Dan said, and he had considerable respect for how far across the country the Times is read, and its probable influence--I wasn't his only call. We chatted on about various things; since Dan came from Minnesota Public Radio I brought up Pipe Dreams and my intention to write you. He knows you, waxed enthusiastic, said he'd been in on getting the program funded, what an avid following the program has, etc. He confirmed that you write all the copy, and told me, among other things, you were an organ major at Oberlin. --So instead of only intending to write, I've now actually written. Thanks for Pipe Dreams. Sincerely,

Jacqueline Jackson

ENNL POLL: How many times have you stopped on the highway verge, even backed up a mile or two, to listen to the end of something that's going out of range on the radio? ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never!

Jacqueline,

Thanks for the fine, fun letter. The world is so small, and everyone seems to be connected...through PIPE DREAMS! Got a letter last week from the great-grandson of organbuilder Aristide Cavaille-Coll (maker of the instruments at Notre Dame Cathedral, St. Sulpice, St. Clothilde, etc.) who listens to the program in Washington, DC (and his mother in NYC!).

Messiaen was a magical man. I heard him play the premiere in Washington, D.C. in 1971 of his "Meditations on Mysteries of the Holy Trinity" (his first and only appearance as an organist in the United States), and two weeks ago was in New York City to hear the Philharmonic perform his "Illuminations of the Beyond..." a score written for the Philharmonic's 150th anniversary season. You'll have a chance to hear more Messiaen in coming PIPE DREAMS broadcasts.

Minnesota Public Radio

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WATS

## Polly and Sam Mersky Combine Tennis with Varied Pursuits, Gusto for Love and Life

Senior Tennis Times, June 1992



It's only when sacred institutions are vulgarized do I have the temerity to take on Gloria Steinem, self-styled modern day campaigner for women's rights. The reason for my indignation: a quote by Steinem in my handy reference book, "The Portable Curmudgeon," in which she sallies: "The surest way to be alone is to get married." Well, friends, that diatribe in relation to our profile principals is a crock. I can document countless marriages full of happiness and togetherness that make Steinem's mutterings nothing more than shallow cynicism.

Let's take the triumph of marriage evidenced by the shining love story that brought Polly and Sam Mersky together. Here's a completely joyous couple constantly under the influence of an intoxicating marital ambrosia. Sic transit Gloria!

While running his Storkville stores, Sam started St. Paul Wholesale Distributors with emphasis on children's wares. In 1951 he also became a partner in Lambert & Simpson Co., an appliance and heating firm in Saint Paul. Spreading his wings in 1955, he started an ice cream franchise called "39 Flavors" which apparently didn't cause a ripple with Baskin & Robbins. While operating Storkville's retail operation, the wholesale venture continued also, and one of Sam's biggest customers at that time was Charles Lazarus, a discount toy store retailer in another city. He is now owner and CEO of Toys 'R Us, largest toy retailers in the world. Sam's marriage was unraveling and divorce followed.

During his business career, along with the ownership of two corporations, he was also vice president and treasurer of Juvenile Stores of America. For 25 years he sang in the Beth El Synagogue choir, Temple of Aaron choir and Scottish Rite choir of Saint Paul. Active in Masonic work, he was a member of Osman Temple (Shriners) for over twenty years.

An active volunteer in community activities, Polly has been with the White Bear Lake League of Women Voters, the Rockford College Alumni Club, the American Cancer Society, the Hennepin County Medical Auxiliary and the Woman's Club of Minneapolis. She's on the music committee at the Minneapolis Woman's Club and also sings in their Lyricals group. After 30 years in the Plymouth Church choir under the direction of Philip Brunelle, she now sings there only in the summer choir. Currently both Polly and Sam volunteer with Meals on Wheels and are assistant teachers in an Intergenerational Program at Ericsson School.

After twenty-one years of holding hands, long-blade skating, dancing twice monthly, downhill and cross country skiing, hiking, swimming, singing together, water skiing, intergenerational teaching and playing tennis with STPC stars, would you call that a fantastic marriage? As if that weren't enough togetherness, Sam has been an organist for about 30 years with a Yamaha FX-20 in the living room of their Kenwood home.

With music their other love, the Merskys express its impact on their lives with a paean: "Music is the wellspring of every sorrow and joy; we love it for what it makes us remember and for what it makes us forget; music is the mind's medicine. There's also an enriched phrase confluent with their singing duets: "The beautiful thing about harmony is you can't sing it alone."

If there's been any atonality in their lives, it would have to be their first marriages and subsequent divorces. But harmoniously, seven wonderful children between them from previous unions have resulted in unbridled joy. With twelve grandchildren and one great-grandchild in the family, the melody lingers on.

Sam Mersky first entered this world on a cold Minneapolis day in March, 1916. He graduated from North High School and later from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting and Economics. Sam was president of Phi Epsilon Pi academic fraternity, treasurer of Mu Beta Chi business fraternity and Social Chairman of the Menorah

Club. He was also active in intramural sports, including boxing and wrestling.

Meanwhile, Pollyann Kirk was born on a farm near Mason City, Iowa in January, 1925. She was the youngest of four children, all living today. After graduation from Mason City High School, she attended Rockford College in Illinois. To earn her keep in college, she worked part time in a war plant.

Sam worked as an accountant for a Saint Paul grocery wholesaler after college, and then shifted over to a major accounting firm (Wolkoff, Effress & Associates) for a year. Then, at age 29, with a wife and three children, he opted for his own business. In 1946 he opened Storkville, the first discount store in this area. It specialized in children's toys, furniture and wheel goods. Within a few years it grew to four outlets in Saint Paul and adjoining suburbs.

In 1944 Polly married Navy Ensign James P. Mahle before he reported for duty in the South Pacific. She was unable to finish her last year of college with her husband then in medical school. Mahle got his MD under the G.I. Bill, and for several years practiced OB-GYN in Minneapolis. They raised four children and were active in the community. Divorced in 1967 (Dr. Mahle died in 1970), Polly met Sam and they married in 1971. In and around that time, Polly had worked as an Art Department Coordinator for Burgess-Beckwith Co. and for Universal Hospital Services as Administrative Coordinator and Editor for their newsletter.

After marriage to Sam, she became (surprise) Vice President of Storkville, Inc. and St. Paul Wholesale Distributors. (go to left column)

Volunteers are urgently needed in the Intergenerational Program, the Merskys emphasize. It's an opportunity for men and women, 55 and over, to volunteer in school classrooms by sharing experiences and hobbies, assisting children with basic school skills or participating in special projects such as Minnesota history, crafts, computer use or oral history. Sponsors are the Community Educational Services of the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Members of the STPC for six years, they echo that "tennis is a fun game with wonderful people. The associations we've formed have led to new friendships and socializing. We joined to play tennis and stayed for the rest." Their tennis philosophy is novel, to say the least: "We don't care if we win or lose - just so we don't lose!"

The Merskys have a personal philosophy based on prose by Nazim Hikmet:

*The most beautiful ocean is the one we have yet to cross.  
The most beautiful child has yet to grow up.  
The most beautiful days are those we have yet to live.  
The loveliest things I'd like to tell you are those I have yet to tell.*

If a writer wanted to pen a romantic best-selling novel like Eric Segal's "Love Story" some twenty-odd years ago, Polly and Sam Mersky's lives would be the only research needed. In the immortal words of Jimmy Durante: "What a pair...What a pair!"

Norm Diamond

Minneapolis Polly & Sam, cousins on the Dougan side, (Polly's dad Roger was Gramp's first cousin) were featured impressively in this tennis publication. My only objection to the writeup is Diamond's taking low shots at Gloria Steinham, who for a fair proportion of us (this editor included) is speaking the truth. We can rejoice that it's not true for Polly & Sam in their marriage.



Polly and Sam with Sasha Manriquez, in the classroom at Ericsson Grade School

No space left in these 3 issues to tell about my fall visit to Covington, Ky, with Phil, Cordelia and Morris Koplow. Plus lots of other news, of yours & mine has been omitted. I'll try to get issues out sooner & fuller.