

Subject: Michigan Man Newsletter

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MICHIGAN MAN NEWSLETTER

April 1, 2004

Let me warn you. Never change your snow tires for your clear road radials on April Fools Day. The irony will not escape even the dimmest bulb in the batch. Even me! Too many times I have made the mistake of assuming the worst was over and went to the garage and had the smoothies put back on only to run into a freak winter squall that left the pavement covered with a translucent icing. Whoops! That's me negotiating the tarvey at 75 mph sliding between the ditches. Anyway, just staying with my Weather Channel theme of the past few months.

April Fools Day!

Our esteemed editor at the Straitsland Resorter is a notorious prankster when it comes April Fools day. This year it as the prospect of Raging Winds Turbine Power Consortium coming to Indian River

to make the area one of the largest producers of wind energy in the world. Over the past few year, eh Straitsland has perpetrated hoaxes on the readership with topics such as a gina overhead rail system, a mega-grant to fund the construction of an indoor snowmobiling park, genetically engineered freshwater lobsters and massive irrigation systems.

Our northern Michigan news leader (Channel 9 & 10 out of Cadillac) featured a story about the reengineering of the Mackinac Bridge to swing to Mackinac Island twice a day. Local radio put on a live mock-rock concert from Masquerade Park in Bluff, MI. There was no shortage of outrageous attempts to reel in the sucker du jour.

I got the reverse reel a few years back. (caution: name drop ahead) Popular talk radio host, at the time, Denny McLain asked me to come on his show and pretend I was Tom Monaghan, the, then, owner of the Detroit Tigers. I had no idea what he was up to.

McLain: Yes, Startling news! Tom Monaghan is moving the Tigers to St. Petersburg FL.”

Me: “Huh? Oh yeah. Florida. Great weather. Lotsa fans! New ballpark! Lotsa upside!”

McLain: “How could you do this to Detroit? They’ve been faithful to the organization the entire twentieth century. I think it stinks what you’re doing.” He winks at me even though I’m already stuttering and stammering trying to think what to say.

Me: Uh...buh...uh..duh...yeah. I mean no. It’s purely business. Bottom line.”

McLain: “Let’s open up the phone lines and see what Detroit has to say!”

Needless; to say, the spite, malice and vitriol that came pouring through the Ma Bell’s apparatus left me shaken and stirred. McLain only exulted in the rabble rousing, gaining momentum, urging the callers on while I sat blanched and mute trying to piece two words together while epithets rained down on me egged on by the gleeful Mr. McLain. He finally exposed the ruse and the bile river started flowing his way, much to my relief. He seemed to grow stronger the more the people chastised him for pulling such

a terrible prank. Bad karma, Denny. The whole episode made the major network news shows in Detroit. Of course, I was an anonymous shlemiel in the joke, but Denny McLain got a little more press and his show was quite popular...until his karma caught up with him.

Needless to say, I have been double wary on April First ever since. Don't trust any one for a whole day. Sorry. I've been burned.

Yahoo Readers Group

Some of you may not like getting the Newsletter in it's full form. If you would like to join the Yahoo Reader's Group go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MikeRidley/>.

or just email a blank message to MikeRidley-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To my knowledge, if you sign up you will not be subject to any spam or pop-ups. It becomes easier for me to reach you when I don't have to break my mailing list down into groups of twenty,copy and paste the Newsletter then send it out one group at a time. Let me know if you would prefer to go to the Yahoo group or are content to receive it the old fashioned way.

It is my endeavor to just stay in touch with you but drop a line and I will accommodate you.

Mary, one of our local librarians and a real lover of books sent me

this. Take a look.

"TAKE A LOOK.....UNLBIEVBEALE

Accdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total msees and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.

Jsut amzanig huh? "

SIGNS OF SPRING

It is that time of year when I desparately begin looking for signs of spring. It usually starts with the path our dog has adopted through the winter where he dutifully laid his business cards, marking out his territory in a more solid way. Not exactly a crocus, but it'll do. Next comes road ill. I know, but things get drastic when March comes in like a lion and goes out like a scizophrenic water buffalo on a rampage, smiling ever so charmingly.

Each day I pass the golf course and pray for a yellow flag on number two or three green. I know

it will be spring. The equinox means nothing, as do dates, position of the sun, pull of the lunar tides or the flags on numbers two and three. Our club manager tells me Easter Weekend we are open for play!.

My friend and ex-team mate, Terry, called me on his way to the Rappahannock (sp?) River to do some fly fishing. Good sign. Things are getting better i hear shot guns near and around our propertyhopefully it's someone patterning their gun for turkey season. Bouncing Bill, my 86 year old golf partner went to a second hand sporting goods store and picked up a new baseball mitt. Probably more than anything I do look forward to baseball/. My son is playing on the school's varsity team and hopes to get some innings in as pitcher and third basemen. The way he phrased his aspirations reminded me of my youth when pitcher covered first base as well. I've dug up another column from a few years back describing how I made my stripes in the baseball world as we knew it during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. When baseball was the antidote for the

Cold War. A side note: I hope to have a book of columns out by summer. I just received word that the manuscript was back from the editor. Stay tuned. In the mean time...

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

If it is true that in sports we see a legitimate reflection of society, it is a shame where that venerable tradition of sandlot baseball has gone. I don't mean Tee-Ball, Little League, Babe Ruth, Connie Mack, American Legion and all the like, I'm talking about a handful of kids, by their own volition, uttering those three little words, "Let's play ball!" It was the code that superseded anything you may have had planned after school or anything your parents had scheduled for your summer activities. You would skip homework, chores, or after school cartoons if the gang was to congregate at the ball field. In this case I don't mean the school's ball field or the Parks and Recreation Department's facility or really anything that resembled an actual baseball field.

The Diamond, when I was growing up, was a

misnomer. Our neighborhood was the underdeveloped, third world nation of suburbia. We had blessedly been passed over by the wheels of progress and had several vacant lots of overgrown quack grass to choose from. The games were the lynch pin of the communal neighborhood and our rules and regulations were nebulous. If you could stand at the proposed home plate and hit the ball anywhere in fair territory and not break a window it was an acceptable arena for competition. At nine years old , two adjacent fifty foot lots would serve well and if the playing field could be arranged with a neighbor's fenced in yard as the left field wall, all the better.

Our bases consisted of a sweatshirt as first, a chunk of plywood as second and an old glove, a cinder block or someone's little brother as third. Third was always the toughest base to slide into, the thought being if you made it this far, there was an extra price to pay. I started out as third base and when my little brother came along I broke him into the business. We all baby-sat on a rotating

basis and our mother's thought us near saintly to take the little squirts off their hands for a few hours. It was quite a sight when we would all show up with our siblings in tow. It was the only time you could stand at home plate and clearly see all the bases albeit just the tops of the little toe-heads. We did develop a standing rule that if you hit a "live" base it was an automatic out. We did learn a certain brand of ethics although we taught our little brothers and sisters to never reveal more than, "I played second base today, Mommy."

Home plate was something of a divine artifact. It would travel with us from field to field, it being the only true constant in our game. Over the course of our journeys we would plop the plate down in late March or early April and there it would remain until the snow started flying in late fall or we spotted some adult pounding stakes in the ground, taking measurements for new home construction. We would then rescue it and begin our search for a new field. It was akin to a prehistoric clan in search of better hunting

grounds with their sacred embers (our Home Plate) being the most important element of the trip. I recall someone's dad cutting it out of a 3/4" piece of plywood to the actual dimensions of home plate and painting it white. Every so often some beneficent soul would slap some more whitewash on it and in a world of dirty sneakers, waterlogged baseballs, discarded bats with finishing nails and friction tape holding it together, torn blue jeans, greasy tee shirts and second hand gloves this white plate became the object of worship at our altar call. It remained with us through out our youth, until like Jack and his Magic Dragon, we came no more.

The shaggy state of our field of dreams had to be reconciled so someone would smuggle their dad's Briggs and Stratton to the "diamond" and plow down the baselines and the batting area and then a trail out to and around the pitcher's mound. He would finish the manicure with a few circular spins around the rubber which was more often than not just a scrap of two by four. The grounds keeper had the most hazardous job, not for fear of

striking a stone or suffering a self-inflicted wound but by chance of being discovered by a family member and the truth be learned by his father that he actually knew how to operate the lawn mower. He would soon be appointed head groundskeeper at his house and that would curtail his playing time with us.

A good field might last a couple of years but in that time someone might claim the field as their own, unaware of the sacrosanct ground they were treading on, and build a fort or for no other reason, save boredom, start digging holes. What a surprise to be running toward the warning track (a mowed lawn which represented the outer limits of our playing field) and suddenly...WHOA!!! Smack dab and down into a shallow pit covered with sumac branches. The good news was you would find your neighbor's (or older brother's) Playboy Magazine and a pack of cigarettes buried in a jar. Not that I was into those things...yet...but it was fortuitous to have the goods on someone older than you who could be persuaded to lighten up on the bully act.

I think in the course of my career we may have fielded nine players on a side..how many times? Well, never. But we were creative. We had the standard “pitcher’s mound is out for first.” That eliminated the need for a first baseman. Anything right of second base was a foul ball (the opposite being the rule for left-handers). That took care of second and right field. An opponent would serve as catcher but don’t count on him to tag anybody out at the plate. That left a shortstop who covered third and a left fielder who, on the wings of Willie Mays, could cover center as well. It was three on three baseball. If an odd man showed up he would be “artificial catcher” until another straggler showed up and evened out the teams. It wasn’t until my older brother came back on furlough from double A ball in the dating league were we informed that the term was “official” catcher. What did we care? We were athletes, not academics. The game looked enormously populated when a parent would drive by and the alarm would be sounded and we would hurriedly instruct our bases to stand up and look happy.

What ended our playing days was not the mushrooming of houses in our neighborhood but as we got older we just outgrew our field. When hitting tennis balls in lieu of a waterlogged hardball became boring we instinctively knew it was time for a different game. Our game became “touch” football, which was true if assault and battery could be classified as a touch. That lasted for a while, then came basketball which took us into high school which in turn saw us graduate to cars, girls and the kids we used to be.

in this age of Liberalism, Me-ism, Pro-Choice, Civil Liberties, Always Question Authority and the concept of ever expanding personal freedoms there seems to have been a yoke or rigidity placed on the spirit of youth whether it be by over-indulgent/over-protective parents or the lure of mindless television and video games.

To have a quality, impromptu pick up game these days the following criteria must be met: One chaperone per every six players, a qualified coach/umpire, a city or township permit to engage in said recreation on municipal property,

permission slips from parents as well as permission from the landowner, disclaimers, medical forms, rules and regulations of sandlot baseball, Title IX compliance and “artificially” approved bats, balls, gloves, helmets, sliding pads, batting gloves, eye black (for glare), tobacco simulated chewing gum, and get this, bases. Next thing you know we’ll be shipping the kids off to military school to teach them how to be spontaneous.

Back Roads

I had a few nice trips this term, one in particular to Newberry, up in the U.P. I entertained at the Chamber of Commerce dinner and met some really fine people. I think, by now, you probably get the feeling that I have a certain affinity for the upper peninsula and its inhabitants. There is something so earthy and real about people who take great pleasure in simple things. One of the presenter for the awards commented that he was honored to be there, especially at his advanced

age. “In fact, Kevin (the chamber president) asked how I felt. I told him I felt great...like a new born baby.”

“That good?” replied the president.

“Good? No! I haven’t got any teeth, no hair and sometimes I poop my pants. Like a newborn baby.” It brought the house down.

I suppose you can tell those kind of jokes in a setting where everybody knows everybody. Maybe that ‘s the small townner in me but I really seem to connect and often envy folks with a great sense of community and the where with all to unabashedly display it. Newberry is one more town where that sense of pride is very evident.

After the show I had a chance to visit with a few people and one of them related this story about his dad who raises bears, twenty-seven of them to be precise, just north of Newberry. I had just seen a feature on human/bear encounters and the disastrous results. I asked if his dad had any “encounters?”

“Oh yeah,” he replied. “Once he was feeding them candy out of the palm of his hand and

without realizing it was still holding an empty left hand out toward the bears while he fed others from his right hand. One of the bears, probably a little pissed because there was no candy chomped down on his open hand and wouldn't let go." Right then he paused to take a sip of beer. Perfect. I was in, hook, line and sinker.

"What did he do?" I asked.

"Well, he reached over and grabbed an electric fence and sent the current through his body and into the bear. The thing yelped and took off running!"

I laughed, as I thought I was supposed to do. "Cool!" Then as a kudo, added, "Good one!"

The son looked at me, very sober. "No, that really did happen." His countenance suddenly shaded, as if I was trying to josh him. So I did what any self-preserving fish would do when suddenly out of water. "Neat," I said, slapping him on the back. "Let me buy you a beer." Things suddenly got brighter. Life and times in the U.P.

Books

I've found another release by one of my favorite authors, James Lee Burke. "The Last Car to Elysian Fields" is another in his series of Dave Robicheaux crime novels. Testosterone fueled but great prose, some of the best I've ever read. Another favorite author is Stephen Hunter, more testosterone and guns but thoroughly enjoyable. One more great book that I highly recommend is "Peace Like River" by Leif Enger. E-mail me your favorites and I'll put them in the next issue.

Schedule

APRIL

Wednesdays April 14 & 28 O'Toole's in Novi

Thursdays April 1, 8, 15, 29 Dick O'Dow's in Birmingham

Thursday April 22 Noggin Room in the Perry Hotel Petoskey

Fridays in April Noggin Room in the Perry Hotel Petoskey

Saturday April 3 Noggin Room in Petoskey

Saturday April 10 Hoppies on Burt Lake

Cheboygan Hospice Benefit Fundraiser April 17

at the Gold Dust Ballroom in Cheboygan
Cheboygan County Humane Society Benefit
Fundraiser April 25 at the VFW in Cheboygan

MAY

Every Wednesday in May at O'Tooles in Novi
Thursday May 6, 13, 27 at Dick O'Dow's in
Birmingham

Every Friday in May at The Noggin Room in the
Perry Hotel in Petoskey

Saturday May 22 at the Buckhorn Inn in Trout
Lake

Saturday and Sunday May 29& 30 at Hoppies on
Burt Lake

(More Saturdays to come. E-mail for information)

Well, I know you've got plenty to do, raking winter
compost, get the bikes ready, the clubs out and
keep the sunscreen handy cuz summer is on it's
way. But don't be in a big hairy hurry to change
those snow tires just yet.

Too often, we lose sight of life's simple pleasures.....Remember, when someone annoys you, It takes 42 muscles in your face to frown BUT, it only takes 4 muscles to extend your arm and smack the asshole upside the head.