

RECORD OPINION

5A
MONDAY
August 19, 1991

Our Opinion

Talks should address some serious concerns

A scheduled meeting between Northville Township and Northville Regional Psychiatric Hospital officials is but the first step in a much-needed review of hospital security procedures and staffing levels.

Hospital and township representatives were to meet Monday morning to discuss topics including walkaways, walkaway routes, staffing levels, and patient criminal histories.

The meeting is just in time, given all the adverse attention paid the hospital of late.

Hospital walkaways are causing major concerns around the Northville community these days. It's not hard to see why. In May, a 27-year-old patient walked away from the hospital — for the third time in as many days — and injured an elderly Northville man while stealing his car. The case is well-documented and sent a chill down the community's collective spine.

The thief later was convicted of unarmed robbery and is expected to cool his heels in the state prison system for the better part of the next three years. But Terrance Jenkins was merely one of 68 psychiatric patients to leave the state hospital grounds at 41001 Seven Mile during the first seven months of 1991. Dr. Walter Brown, the hospital director and official spokesperson, says the figures are no real cause for alarm. Walkaway reports aren't up, he says, and most walkaways only leave to get away from the hospital, not to wreak havoc on the community.

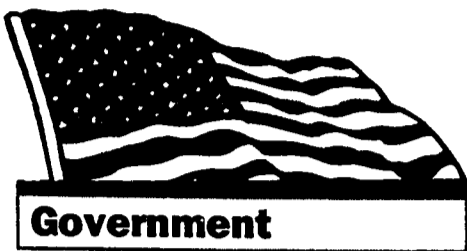
That may well be the case. Brown certainly knows his patients better than we do. But while scanning township police reports, we are noticing a rather disturbing trend among many of the walkaways. "Potentially dangerous," some are called. Others carry an "assaultive and combative" tag. One patient escaped in the aftermath of the Jenkins affair and has yet to be recovered.

He reportedly had threatened to kill his mother and children before he left.

And last Tuesday a man apparently dashed away from the hospital, traveled south into the under-construction Northville Trail subdivision, and stole a worker's truck. At press time he hadn't been heard from since.

Brown says walkaway numbers are consistent with past figures. Quite frankly, we don't buy it. August walkaways are spiraling toward 20 by mid-month, which would be a dramatic increase over the nine-per-month average thus far in 1991.

Clearly a problem is at hand. Township police speak publicly about addressing the walkaway situation in a proactive manner — stepping up patrols in neighboring residential areas, closer



Government

scrutiny of hospital radio communications, etc. Privately, though, they're afraid that a crime more brutal than the Jenkins incident is on the horizon.

We feel the same fears. And residents are worried, too. They are fearful for their children and for themselves. Some are upset that they can't recline in a lawn chair in their own backyard without lingering feelings that a psychiatric patient will accost them.

What can be done? First of all, if the state hospital has nothing to hide, as Brown has long stated, township officials should be provided substantial information pertaining to hospital operations.

Brown said approximately 720 patients reside at Northville Regional. What is the effect of former Ypsilanti patients on the Northville facility? How many of those 720 patients have criminal backgrounds? We don't need specific names; we do need specific numbers and types of crimes. We also think it would be a good idea to immediately communicate criminal histories to township police when any walkaway occurs.

How many security personnel are on duty — inside buildings and patrolling the grounds — during each shift throughout the day? Have state layoffs affected staffing levels? Those figures should be documented and made available to local government officials at regular intervals.

And if state Sen. Robert Geake is going to trumpet the fact that a fence has been constructed around the perimeter, shouldn't it be a fence that would at least discourage a walkaway? The current fence is easy to vault or scale. It seemingly is nothing more than a political compromise between the fencing and non-fencing bureaucrats who work in Lansing.

Township officials threaten to take legal action against the state if their questions are not answered and the walkaway problem does not diminish. Here's hoping Brown is not too saddled with Lansing directives to achieve some form of positive communication with the township.

It's obvious to many that some serious problems exist at Northville Regional Hospital. We hope the state recognizes local concerns and addresses them promptly and effectively.

Rick Byrne

Entertainment from the mail



I think I've been destined to be a copy editor ever since Mrs. O'Donnell's seventh grade English class. She ruled the class with an iron ruler, and was a right-wing guerrilla for good sentence structure and proper usage.

Unfortunately, a lot of it rubbed off on me. I was probably the only kid who ever corrected his father's English in front of company and lived to tell the tale.

Now I'm an adult, and I have a little more self-discipline. If someone dangles a particle in front of me, I can let it go. I can channel the energy into my blue pencil at work.

But even the boo-boos of the staff in this office can't compare to the reams of fractured English being turned out by the nation's public relations firms.

Managing Editor Mike Malott estimates that we receive something like 100 press releases a day in this office. As you'd expect, that leaves a lot of room for errors.

I can't say it really bothers me that press releases seem to be printed in a language other than my own. It amuses me, and at times it enralls me like ancient Latin prose. And is about as useful.

For instance, the word "service" takes on strange new uses when a PR writer gets ahold of it. Where I come from, when service is used as a verb, it describes what a stud does to a mare. So when I read that "XYZ Co. will service the entire Northville community," I wonder whether I should tip off the

vice squad or congratulate the company for its fortitude. (It should have been "XYZ Co. will serve. . .")

Another popular PR move is to remove all the little words like "in" and "of," and replace them with commas, as in "Bill Sellers, Vice President, Marketing, ABC Bank, has announced that. . ."

Taken to the extreme, this phenomenon results in sentences like, "Tom Shifty, Vice President, Personnel, Corporate, Northeast Region, Framingham, Mass., was promoted to Trustee, Headquarters, Corporate."

It baffles me as to why the writer hacks out all those friendly little words, and rearranges the names and titles in an unusable order. It makes me wonder if the writer also backwards, talking, enjoys.

While we're on the subject of titles, I should probably point out that they're a very important part of any press release. PR people know that a client loves nothing better than to hear his title alongside his name. Important people, and even not-so-important people, are like that.

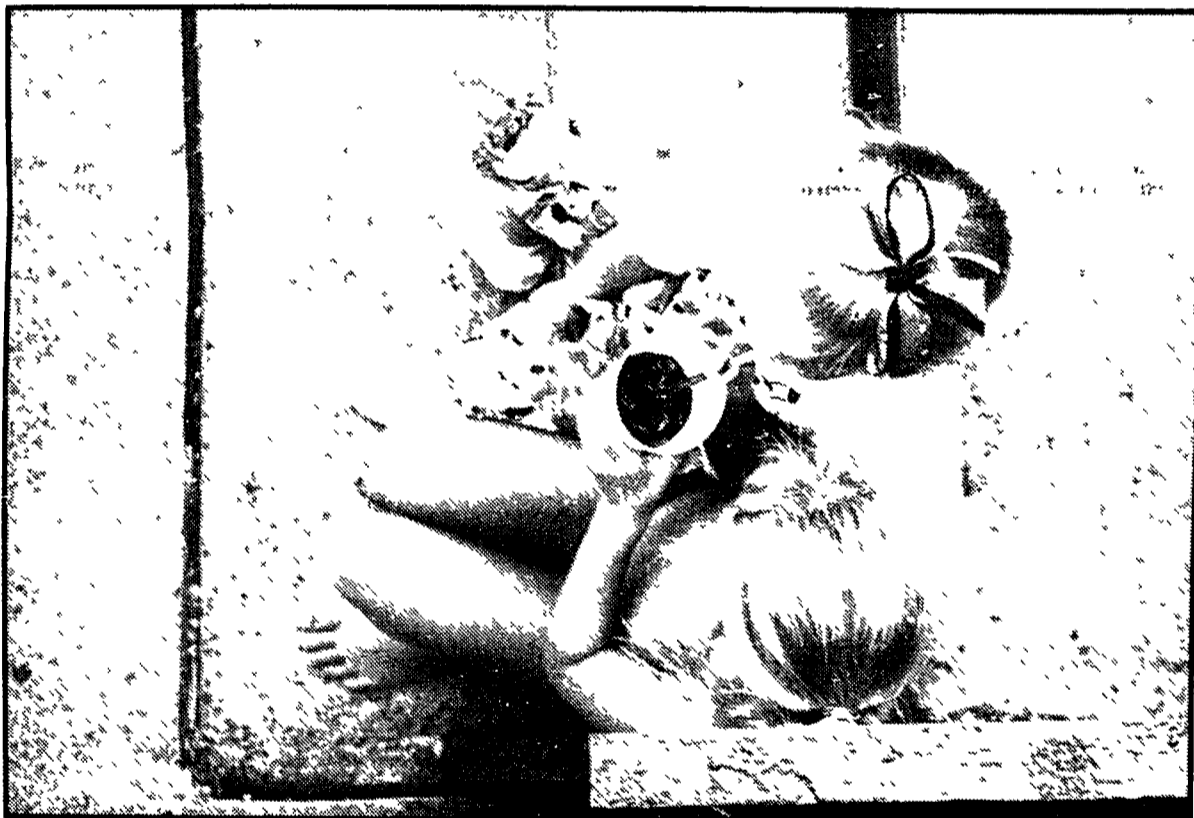
At every opportunity, the person's title and any words attached to it — and even those appearing near it — should be capitalized. Yet in an effort to hit the highlights, the writer sometimes elevates capitalization to ridiculous heights.

I mean, would you really print a story that said, "Joe Blue-collar has been promoted from Broom to Mop in the Custodial Engineering Division?"

Weeding through this jungle is a tough job, but if somebody's got to do it, it might as well be the copy editor. Oops! I mean Editor, Copy.

In Passing

By HAL GOULD



Sharing

Phil Jerome

Confession good for the soul



I have a confession this week, folks. It's something I generally try to keep hidden — at least when I'm writing this column, or, when I can be construed as acting in any sort of official or unofficial capacity for the paper.

But the truth of the matter is that I am not always quite as clean-cut and wholesome as I try to come across in my column.

Sorry. Hope I haven't burst any bubbles. . . shattered any illusions.

But the flat-out truth is that nasty, little impure and/or unkind thoughts occasionally creep into my consciousness.

It's not something I'm proud of. And please don't blame my parents. They did the best they could. They made sure I attended church every Sunday, and it was not unusual for my name to be on the list of students who had both perfect attendance and memorized all the Bible verses in Sunday school.

They say that confession is good for the soul, so, with any luck, my soul ought to be feeling a whole lot better right now.

What brings this sudden compulsion for confession to mind is a phone call I received from Fran Hopp of the Northville Housing Commission last Thursday.

Fran called to say she had read my column about our class reunion and was interested in the questionnaire I had mentioned — the one in which we asked classmates to respond to a variety of questions ranging from who was your favorite teacher to what were your best and worst high school memories.

Seems like Fran is helping to organize her own high school reunion and thought it might be fun to send out a question-

nare to all of her former classmates. So, she called to ask if I would send her a copy of the one we used.

I told her I didn't have a copy of the questionnaire with me, but I felt I could remember most of the questions if she would just like to write them down.

"Well, you'll probably want to include the one about who did you always want to date in high school but never did," I said. "That was a fun question. And if you're feeling brave, you will also want to include the 'virgin' question."

"The 'virgin' question?" she asked, puzzled.

And that's when it occurred to me that I had deleted any mention of the infamous "virgin" question from my column about the questionnaire because I didn't want people to think I'm a dirty old man.

"Oops," I told Fran. "I forgot that I deleted all reference to the 'virgin' question from my column. Please forget that I even mentioned it."

"No, no," she insisted. "What was the 'virgin' question? I want to know about the 'virgin' question."

So I told her. Quite simply, the "virgin" question was that we asked people whether they had been a virgin when they graduated from high school.

But we figured some people might be offended, so we softened it up a little by making it a multiple choice question — Yes. No. Or. None of your blankety-blank business.

"Did anyone answer the 'virgin' question?" asked Fran.

"About half and half," I answered truthfully. "About half ignored it completely. Left it blank. One girl even retyped the questionnaire and deleted the 'virgin' question entirely."

"But the other half answered it?" queried Fran.

"Well, yeah, but the most popular answer was none of your blankety-blank business."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This newspaper welcomes letters to the editor. We ask, however, that they be issue-oriented, confined to 400 words and that they contain the signature, address, and telephone number of the writer. The writer's name may be withheld from publication if the writer fears bodily harm, severe persecution, or the loss of his or her job. The writer requesting anonymity must explain his or her circumstances. Submit letters for consideration by 4 pm Monday for that Thursday's paper. We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity, clarity, libel, and taste.

The week prior to an election, this newspaper will not accept letters to the editor that open up new issues. Only responses to already published issues will be accepted, with this newspaper being the final arbiter. This policy is an attempt to be fair to all concerned.

Submit letters to: Editor, The Northville Record, 104 W. Main, Northville, MI 48167.

Publication Number USPS 396880

The Northville Record

STAFF

Executive Editor.....Richard Perlberg
Managing Editor.....Philip Jerome
Editor.....Michael Malott
Staff Reporter.....Bob Needham
Staff Reporter.....Scott Daniel
Staff Reporter.....Cristina Ferrer
Staff Reporter.....Neil Geoghegan
Staff Reporter.....Suzanne Holtyer
Staff Reporter.....Jan Jeffres
Staff Reporter.....Stephen Kellman
Staff Reporter.....Mike Tyree
Staff Photographer.....Bryan Mitchell
Graphics Editor.....Chrs Boyd
Graphic Artist.....Angela Predhomme
Copy Editor.....Rick Byrne
Sales Director.....Michael Previllo
Sales Manager.....Michael Jetchick
Associate Sales Manager.....Gary Kelber
Sales Representative.....Sandy Mitchell
Sales Representative.....Krstin Hall

Member:

- Michigan Press Association
- Suburban Newspapers of America
- National Newspaper Association

Represented nationally by

- U.S. Suburban Press, Inc.
- Michigan Newspaper Coop., Inc.
- American Newspaper Representatives, Inc.

Business, news, and advertising offices located at 104 W. Main St., Northville, MI 48167. Telephone (313) 349-1700, Fax (313) 349-1050. Send address changes to The Northville Record, P.O. Box 899, Brighton, MI 48116

HOME TOWN

A subsidiary of Suburban Communications Corp