



Horton's

Michigan Notebook

Political & Social Commentary

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Remembering a Heartfelt Message

By Steve Horton

I started working as a reporter with the *Livingston County Press* and its sister publication, *The Fowlerville Review*, in late May of 1976. The publisher of those weeklies, and several others around Michigan, was Richard 'Dick' Milliman.

Mr. Milliman passed way in March of 2016 at the age of 89. Early on he had worked as a reporter at different newspapers, eventually covering state government for the *Lansing State Journal*. He then served as a press secretary for Gov. George Romney, and still later became a newspaper publisher. Over the course of 35 years, at one time or the other he owned weeklies and dailies in 27 different communities.

Along with operating the business, Dick wrote a column that he called the 'Almanack'—a play on his first name and Benjamin Franklin's famous 'Poor Richard's Almanack'.

One of the traditions practiced by many newspaper columnists over the years has been to offer a heartfelt message at Christmastime. During my 40-plus years as a journalist, I've attempted a few of these myself. However, on

my first Christmas as a reporter, I wrote a column entitled "It's time to settle on a contract." This was in reference to the stalemate that had occurred in contract talks between the Fowlerville Board of Education and the teachers.

In urging a settlement, I wrote: "Nearly four months have passed since problems concerning the talks first surfaced. The bargaining itself has been going on since June.

"The story's basic substance has changed little during that length of time," I continued, adding a bit later, "The teachers have lowered several of their requests, along with dropping others. The school board, however, still feels that many of their proposals are too costly to accept.

"After seven months, the paramount question becomes 'who is responsible for the continuing stalemate?'" I asked.

Wishing to be perceived as even-handed, I found blame on both sides as well as merit in their respective positions. I also offered a couple of recommendations.

Without researching the matter, I can't say how much time passed before the contract was finally settled. However, I doubt that I had much influence with either side in hastening a resolution, given that I was all of 25 and had only been reporting for about seven months. To say I lacked gravitas in the matter would be an understatement. Most of the school board members were of my

parents' generation, so I had little pull with them. The teachers, while closer to my age, saw me more as a means of conveying their position to the public than being overawed by my counsel.

That said, re-reading the commentary all these years later, I think I did a pretty good job.

The column appeared at the top of the opinion page of *The Review* in the Wednesday, December 22, 1976 edition. Newsworthy to be sure, but hardly a heartfelt message. That task was more than ably handled by Dick Milliman whose 'Almanack' appeared below my article. He called his piece "One solitary life..."

I've taken the liberty of re-printing it—a holiday gift to the paper's readers.

The news comes and goes, our accompanying passions ebb and flow, but Dick Milliman (with his column) offers a message that's more enduring, more timeless. They are indeed "words to live by."



One solitary life...

By Richard Milliman

Richard Milliman, who passed away in 2016, published this column in December of 1976.

Here is a young man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

While He was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

While He was dying, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth, and that was His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that one solitary life.

Of course, I didn't write that article; I only repeat it from the original and unknown author. But it seems to me that in a relatively few lines, the story of "One Solitary Life" helps us to add perspective to our activities, especially as we enjoy the holiday season each year.

What we each seek is happiness, each in his own form, and happiness comes in many guises. As long as I'm quoting, let me endorse the formula of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"A Happy Life is to laugh often and to love much...to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children...to earn the approbation of honest critics and to endure the betrayal of friends...to appreciate beauty...to find the best in everything...to give one's self...to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition...to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and to have sung with exaltation...to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived..."

Yes, we need a credo, a purpose, a plan to our living. We need principles, truth, faith. We need prayer.

One of the most beautiful and touching prayers is the familiar prayer of St. Francis:

"Lord make me an instrument of your peace...where there is hatred, let me sow love...where there is injury, pardon... where there is doubt, faith...where there is despair, hope... where there is darkness, light...and where there is sadness, joy.

"Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console...to be understood as to understand...to be loved as to love...for it is in giving that we receive...it is in pardoning that we are pardoned...and in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Truly, words to live by.

To all of you, a blessed and joyous holiday season from the Almanack.