



Bob Greene

Dentist keeps pain out of the pocket

If you think that all of the news is rotten and depressing, spend a few minutes with this story. Maybe it will cheer you up as much as it did me.

Earl Rozika, 74, of Bensenville, lives mostly off his Social Security. Several weeks ago he needed some oral surgery done. His dentist in Bensenville, who has treated Rozika for more than 30 years, was a little reluctant to do the procedure himself; Rozika had been hospitalized twice for heart attacks, and the dentist wanted to recommend an oral surgeon, just in case there were problems.

So Rozika made an appointment with the oral surgeon his own dentist had recommended: Dr. Michael Lauck, whose offices are in Elmhurst.

"Dr. Lauck's offices were very impressive-looking," Rozika said. "The three female attendants were crisply gowned and extremely pleasant, much concerned with my comfort. Dr. Lauck came in, introduced himself to me, shared a few pleasantries, and then injected my gums in three places.

"During the procedure, I scolded myself for not having made financial arrangements prior to the work. This was a first-class setup, and I knew that I was in for a stiffer bill than I had anticipated.

"When the doctor was done with me, I went to the front office. I was truly apprehensive about the cost. The receptionist filled out some forms, and as she handed them to me, I asked, 'What do I owe?'

"She said, 'Five.'

"I almost fainted, knowing that she meant \$500. I was already thinking about where I could borrow the money, and how I could explain that I couldn't pay right away.

"Then I looked at the bill. It was for \$5.

"The receptionist said, 'Doctor sometimes does this for senior citizens.' At first I thought there might be some misunderstanding, but she said no, all I owed was \$5. So I paid her with a five-dollar bill. I was overwhelmed then, and I still am now. I find it almost incredible."

I got in touch with Dr. Michael Lauck. Initially he was reluctant to discuss the matter with me, but after a few days he said he didn't see how it would hurt to talk about it.

"Yes, this is the way I do things," he said. "I'm 48 years old; I've had my practice for a while. I decided early on that I would do this for senior citizens who weren't in good financial shape, and for handicapped people. You make a pretty good living doing what I do. I told myself that if the financial success of my practice hinged on the number of extractions that I did on elderly patients who really couldn't afford it, then I'm in trouble.

"Oral surgery is expensive. It's not uncommon for a bill to run from \$500 to \$700. Major jaw surgery can go from \$3,500 to \$10,000. I just couldn't sleep at night if I knew that I had charged an elderly person a fee that might prevent that person from buying groceries."

Dr. Lauck said that originally he charged senior citizens with limited funds nothing at all. But soon he found that they preferred the \$5 charge; the token charge made them feel that they weren't charity cases.

"Life is less than simple for some people," he said. "As I told you, my practice does very well. My family doesn't have to worry about food on the table. So by doing this, I feel good. In fact, my annual income isn't what makes me feel successful. Doing this is what makes me feel successful."

I spoke with Georgiana Sedlacek, one of Dr. Lauck's surgical assistants. "Dr. Lauck makes a rule of never being in the room when the bill is presented," she said. "He figures out which of his patients should get the \$5 charge, and he signals us. So when we present the patient with the bill for \$5, Dr. Lauck is nowhere to be seen.

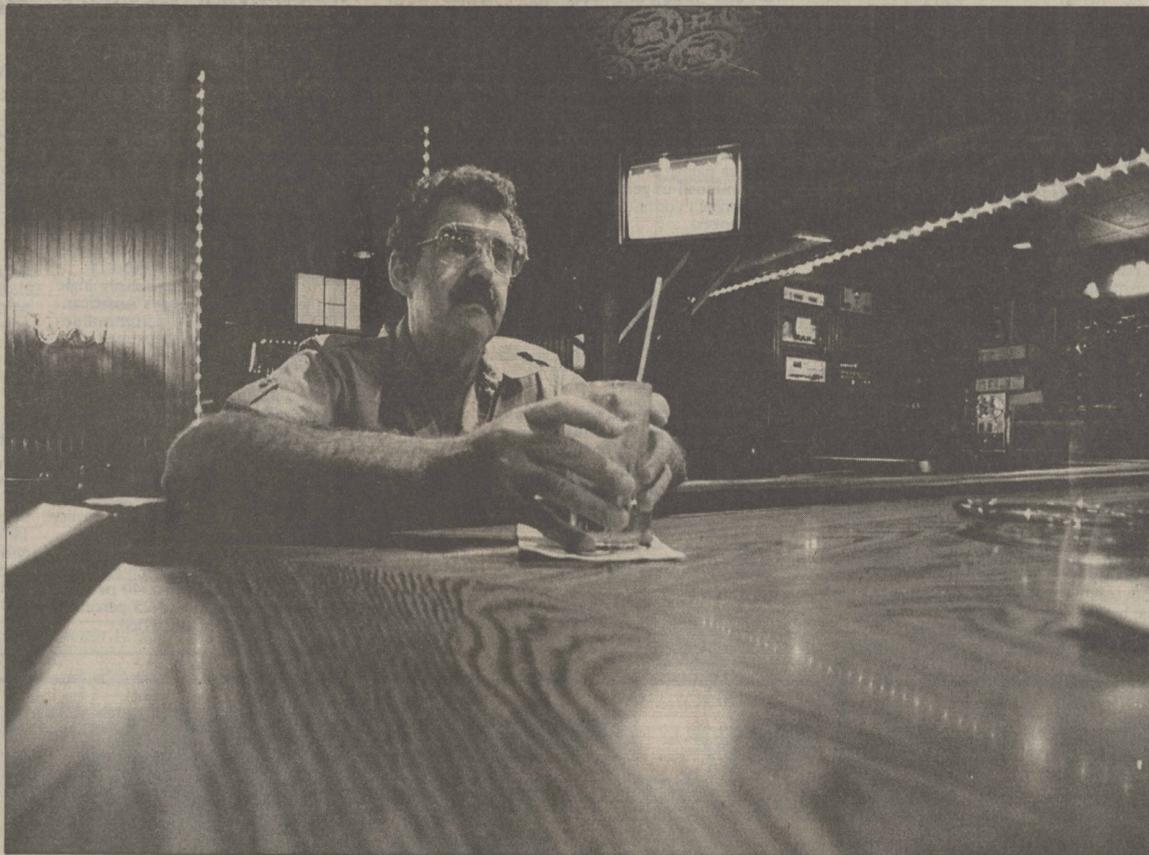
"There's a reason for that. He doesn't want the patients falling all over themselves with gratitude. He wants them to be able to preserve their dignity. But I'll tell you... I'm there when some of these elderly and handicapped people find out that they're only being charged \$5, and I get so damn emotional I feel like I'm going to cry. It makes you feel like you're a part of the human race."

Sedlacek said that at first most patients don't understand. "They say, 'I think there's some mistake,'" she said. "And we say, 'There's no mistake. Come see us when you need us.' Then they think that we assume their insurance is going to pay the rest. They say, 'We have no insurance.' And we say, 'We know. The bill is \$5.'"

As I noted before, at first Dr. Lauck wasn't sure he wanted to talk about this with me. There are obvious potential problems; for one, his office phone will probably ring off the hook this morning with calls from people wanting \$5 dental service.

"I'll deal with that when and if it happens," he said. "What you have to understand is that I'm really doing this for selfish reasons. It dawned on me early in my career: If I can do this and feel better about myself as a person, then I'll do it. I've never regretted it."

Living alone: Phil Klinsky



Tribune photo by Charles Cherney

After 25 years of marriage, being single means confronting solitude

By Mary T. Schmich

Phil Klinsky measures the difference between living with his family and living by himself in exquisitely ordinary ways.

Once, he could putter among the impatiens in the back yard of his four-bedroom house. Now he waters the potted plants on the sole sunny windowsill in his one-bedroom apartment.

Once, he could rely on his wife to do the wash. Now he scrounges around the apartment for quarters and hauls his dirty clothes to the basement laundry room.

Once, he could invite the neighbors over for spur-of-the-moment back-yard barbecues. Now his friends live a long drive away, and his grill sits on a tiny balcony with a view of a parking lot.

Once, he could talk to his kids while he and they lounged around the house. Now they meet in restaurants, and he resigns himself to public conversation, concluded when the waitress brings the check.

During the 25 years that he was married, Klinsky often had wished things were quieter around the house. He would have liked a little less chaos and a little more freedom.

Lying on the family-room couch on a Saturday afternoon, in the comfort and safety of his Highland Park home, sometimes he envisioned himself frolicking in the sand with Club Med maidens or standing in some dark singles bar surrounded by a gaggle of unbelievably available blondes.

He could drift through the fantasies until a door slammed or his kids started yelling or a command cracked the air like a whip: "Take the garbage out, Phil."



This is the fourth in a six-part series.

No matter how tempting his reverie or how troubled his soul, though, he never wanted to be anything but married, and never in even his freakiest fantasy had he imagined himself living alone.

"Never, never, never," he says. "I lived with my parents. I got married at 19 and lived with my wife. The kids grew up, she left, I lived with the dog. The dog died—then I lived on my own."

He spreads his arms and shrugs. "That's when life began. Isn't that what they say? 'Life begins when the dog dies?'"

Between 1962 and 1981, the annual number of divorces in the United States tripled. Klinsky, 47, is among the more than 2 million divorced men who live alone, a population that has contributed significantly to the tripling of one-person American households in the last quarter century. A divorce often creates two new households, commonly one with mother and children and one with the man alone.

Although divorced men are far likelier than divorced women to live by themselves,

however, they tend to be less happy doing so. They are less likely to have maintained friendships outside marriage or to have mastered domestic skills. Klinsky was as unprepared as most.

He is a big, full-faced man with thick black hair and a matching mustache. He looks enough like Dennis Farina, star of the TV series "Crime Story," that he worked for a while as Farina's stand-in. Now that the series' crew has moved to Las Vegas, he works as a telephone salesman and a representative for a key-chain company.

Klinsky was a year out of Austin High School on the West Side when he married a woman he had known since they were 16. He dropped out of college after a few classes, and by the time he was 21 he owned a small grocery store on the South Side.

It did well, so he sold it and bought a bigger one, eventually adding a snack shop and a dry cleaner to his holdings. He moved his family into a two-story, brick-and-cedar house in Highland Park, where on the weekends he could work in the garden or build furniture in his basement workshop.

Then, four years ago, the neat schedule of his life went awry.

The marriage was over. No infidelity, he says. He and his wife had just, in the words that have been the epitaph to a million marriages, "grown apart."

After she left and he sold his business, he lived by himself for a while in the Highland Park house. He closed off most of the rooms, constricting his world to a bedroom, a bathroom and the den. He lived on McDonald's hamburgers and salad from the

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Tribulations of business, in brief

Ever since she started her own business nearly two years ago, Lila Williams has endured her share of frustration. Still, she presses earnestly on, determined to make Panty-of-the-Month a successful and snicker-free enterprise.

For those who missed our previous reports, by calling Williams' 1-718-PANTIES hot line, customers order a \$14.95 designer panty or men's brief each month for 3, 6 or 12 months. Each is gift-wrapped and accompanied by a gold-embossed letter from Williams that says, in effect, that somebody cares enough to send the very best.

Ninety percent of Williams' customers, she says, are men, who order subscriptions for wives and sweethearts, and 10 percent are women, who order briefs for men. She ruefully acknowledges that not everyone fully understands the concept.

Just before Mother's Day, Williams placed a commercial on WNBC radio in New York urging men to order Panty-of-the-Month subscriptions for their wives on Mother's Day. Disc jockey Alan Colmes read her ad copy, then commented, "You

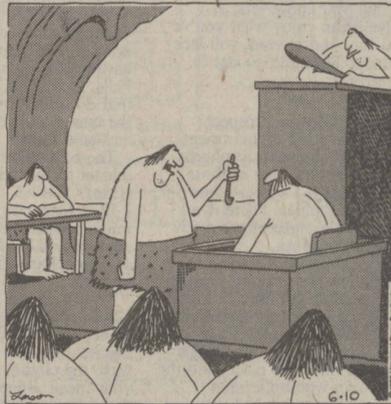
can't buy your mother something like that for Mother's Day, can you?" Three performers from the porn-film industry—Candida Royale, Alexis Firestone and Scott Baker—who appeared on the show, were happy to accompany a reading of Williams' commercial with, as she put it, "sex noises."

If that were not enough, "Panty-of-the-Month appears in July's issue of Penthouse," says Williams, "under, of all things, 'Sex News.'" It also has been featured in Cavalier, "a magazine," Williams says, "that would make [Penthouse publisher] Bob Guccione blush."

We reminded Williams that any publicity is said to be good publicity, but she was not convinced. She told of a Chicago woman whose car telephone number was mistakenly broadcast on radio here as the panties hot line. The woman began to receive calls from men asking for crotchless, edible and used panties. Williams made amends by giving the woman a free subscription.

Clarence Petersen

THE FAR SIDE



You recognize this, Mr. Grok? ... We found it in the bushes near the victim's cave. Isn't this your atlatl, Mr. Grok?

2 Tales from the front
Woe be unto the Transition Person

3 Robert Townsend
Creator of 'The Hollywood Shuffle'

9 Dear Abby
Mother's Day? Bah, humbug!