

THE DISTRICT LINE By Bill Gold



Bill Gold

A Great Place For a Vacation

One who has returned from vacation must respond with considerable frequency to the question, "Where'd you go?"

I went nowhere and found it a rather nice place to be. I hope to go back next year.

Staying at home gave me a chance to catch up on scores of things that had been put aside during the previous 11 months for lack of time. For one thing, I got a chance to read about 40 pounds of clippings, letters, books, magazine articles and pamphlets that had accumulated on my reading table.

Of the lot, for some strange reason I found myself most interested in "Introduction to Satire" by Leonard Feinberg, professor of English at Iowa State University. I don't know how much the book costs because I borrowed a copy the author had autographed for my colleague Larry Laurent, and for all I know the book may now be out of print and unavailable. It was published in 1967 by the Iowa State University Press.

In the course of his textbook, Prof. Feinberg recalled hundreds of memorable one-liners, among them these:

Twain: "Familiarity breeds contempt, and children."

Bierce: "Painting is the art of protecting flat surfaces from the weather and exposing them to the critic."

Laski: "A liberal is a man with both feet planted squarely in midair."

Ward: "An optimist is anybody who doesn't give a darn what happens as long as it happens to somebody else."

Marquis: "A pessimist is a person who has had to listen to too many optimists."

Just as my vacation ended, a review copy of "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye" arrived (Little, Brown & Co., 434 pages, \$8.95). "Johnny" is John F. Kennedy, and the book deals with the memories of Kennedy retained by two of his closest friends, Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers. I fell in love with it at once and at page 93 found it awfully hard to put down for no better reason than to return to work.

One passage that will surely cause comment says that just before President Kennedy left Washington on his ill-fated visit to Dallas, he told O'Donnell that "he had made up his mind that after his reelection he would take the risk of unpopularity and make a complete withdrawal of American military forces from Vietnam. He had decided that our military involvement in Vietnam's civil war would only grow steadily bigger and more costly without making a dent in the larger political problem of Communist expansion in Southeast Asia."

Some of the historic footnotes supplied by the "Irish mafia" are spiced with humor, at least when viewed in retrospect. But Lyndon B. Johnson wasn't in the slightest amused on the day when he, as Vice President, sought audience with President Kennedy to lodge a complaint about the President's brother, Bobby.

Johnson had gone to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to ask that Sarah Hughes be appointed to a federal judgeship from Texas. But Bobby said no, because she was too old.

So LBJ had to go to his old friend Sarah and tell her that the Justice Department considered her too old for the job. Then he went to his second choice for the appointment and told the man that he was being recommended.

At that point, the Berlin crisis flared, and the President sent Mr. Johnson to Germany.

When LBJ got back to Washington, he was astounded to learn that Sarah Hughes had been appointed to a federal judgeship after all! Johnson stormed off to tell Kennedy how embarrassing all this was.

"Sarah Hughes thinks I'm nothing," he told the President. "The lawyer I offered the job to after your brother turned Sarah down, he thinks I'm the biggest liar and fool in the history of the state of Texas."

O'Donnell explains that despite LBJ's suspicion that Bobby had done him dirt, there was more to the story than that. What had happened was that during LBJ's absence Bobby had run into Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn and had asked him when he thought the Judiciary Committee might turn loose a couple of bills in which the Justice Department had a special interest. Mr. Sam ventured the opinion that those bills might never get out of committee unless good old Sarah Hughes was nominated to a judgeship.

When Bobby protested that Mrs. Hughes was too old, Mr. Sam said to him:

"Son, everybody looks old to you. Do you want those bills passed or don't you?" The next day, Sarah Hughes got her appointment.

If the first 93 pages are a fair sample, this is going to be a delightful book. I wish I could take a couple of more days of annual leave to finish reading it.

BRING THE KIDDIES

It may have seemed to my wife that I spent my entire vacation reading, but that is an exaggeration. We did manage to eat out a dozen times, and of the new places we tried, we liked La Chansonette best. And we even took in a picture show, something we seldom do lately.

The picture was a preview of "They Only Kill Their Masters," which will probably make a lot of money for MGM. It is a cops-and-robbers story that moves along at a reasonably good pace and is seasoned with an occasional dash of humor. Several members of the cast play their roles quite well, among them a Doberman who demonstrates that you can't judge an actor by the number of his legs. Even people who don't like dogs will love this one.

Incidentally, I know I'm a square, and hopelessly behind the times, but the "Parental Guidance" rating on this picture leaves me wondering what kind of standards we set for our children these days. The film deals with violence, lesbianism, murder, and swinging sex codes, including a standard nude scene in a bedroom. Parental guidance, you say? In my day, parents would have had a quick answer for any child of theirs who wanted to attend this kind of theatrical fare.