

Wearing well in a cornerstone

By Garrison Keillor

Somehow it just didn't seem right for the YWCA building to be torn down after only 46 years. It was made of brick and appeared to be fairly sturdy and probably had a few years of usefulness left. But the YWCA had done a feasibility study, which showed that renovation of the building was not feasible or at least not as feasible as tearing it down and raising a new one. So I guess they did the only feasible thing.

It was dead wrong, though, for the YWCA to open the cornerstone of the building and reveal the artifacts that were placed there in 1928. These included newspaper clippings ("YWCA to lay cornerstone"), a copy of the dedication speech, a list of YWCA officers and staff and a photograph of Elisa Cortes, the YWCA's delegate in Buenos Aires.

These items were put in the cornerstone in good faith. The cornerstone-layers must have believed that the YWCA building would stand for a century

or more and that, when somebody opened the cornerstone in 2028 or later, the items would be considered strangely fascinating. But in 1974 they are not even slightly interesting.

Now the new YWCA cornerstone has been laid. It contains the 1973-74 Legislative Manual, promotional literature from the Chamber of Commerce and a proclamation by Mayor Albert Hofstede. This is more stuff that won't become interesting for a long, long time. Will the new YWCA building remain standing that long? I doubt it, and so I think it's time we seek a new approach to cornerstone filling, an approach that's in line with current feasibility standards, that asks the question: What will people want to know about us 40 or 50 years from now?

I think they will want to know about real life.

Such things as: Is it true that in the old days football fans ate their dinners in the parking lot before games? Is it true that people back then used deo-

dorants to keep "dry" (and how dry did they get)? Where and what was the "West Bank"? What was a "Whopper"?

Who was Mel Jass?

What was it like to live then?

These questions can't be answered by officials, who tell their administrative assistants, "Get me some stuff to put in the cornerstone this afternoon." They can only be answered by us, the people, over a period of time.

So I suggest to architects an accessible cornerstone, one with a slot on the front, like the night deposit boxes at banks. Whenever we look at something (a family snapshot, the fuel-oil bill, a copy of the Tribune) and think, "This will sure be interesting 46 years from now," we could take it down to the stone and stick it in for posterity. Old check stubs, high school annuals, souvenirs of Split Rock Lighthouse, attendance pins, term papers, locks of hair, Twins scorecards, old ties, old prescriptions, old what-

chamacallits—all the stuff we save because we can't throw it out.

I am going to donate an old T-shirt to that cornerstone. It's the shirt I wore when I robbed my Uncle Don of a double in a father-son softball game some 15 years ago. I was playing third base. He hit a blazing grounder down the line, which I backhanded and threw to first for the out. I've put that old T-shirt in with the dustcloths several times, and each time reconsidered and saved it. Not for myself, understand, but for my grandchildren.

It was a fine play to begin with, and every year it gets better: The ball is hit harder, I reach farther, Uncle Don runs faster—but still I throw him out every time. In another 50 years, it is going to be one of the greatest plays ever made by a third baseman, and we ought to keep something to remember it by.

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