

FORUM

No need to throw a 'pity party'



Nigel Alston

Motivational Moments

Oh, the good times when we were so unhappy.
- Alexandre Dumas

I am listening to Patti LaBelle singing on her live CD, "One Night Only."

She takes a break mid-song to tell the audience a sad story. Patti gave her family a whole lot of material things. "A whole lot of money," she said.

But she never gave them her time. And that mistake is one LaBelle regrets to this day.

In one fell swoop, she lost most of her immediate family.

Her mother died. She lost her father. And within months, three of her sisters died of cancer.

The sad part is that most, if not all, died before reaching 40.

Throughout her ordeal, LaBelle continued working - performing before hundreds of thousands of people and putting on a brave face. Never did she talk about her personal

agony.

But that all changed after the death of her youngest sister. Faced with more sorrow than she thought she could bear and staring down her own mortality, LaBelle went public.

I imagine an anguished LaBelle had a long list of "should ofs," "could ofs" and "I wishes."

She "might of" wished she had visited my sister before she died to tell her I cared. She "might of" wished she had spent more time with family and less time on the road. She "might of" wished for just a few extra moments to make amends.

She probably wished she could go back in time and hold her sisters' hands as cancer ravaged their bodies.

Missed opportunity - the kind you agonize over.

LaBelle's pain reminds me of a story about a person who decided to take his "get-away-trip." You know the trip. The one you take because things aren't going your way. When the negative thoughts take over and you wish you could just get away.

For some the trip is a physical one. For others, its purely mental voyage to the land of "if only."

It reminds me of the guilt we often feel when we don't do the important things in life or take advantage of opportunities that come our way. How we wallow in pity and regret.

I have been on the trip myself. It often is unpleasant and unnecessary. You can't sawdust. A total waste of time

as a matter of fact. It requires a lot of work and often stops you dead in your tracks. It can be self imposed, however, you can allow someone else to pay your fare.

What is it?
The annual guilt trip!

The trip you take when you feel sorry for yourself. You don't believe things can get any better. You've probably taken it before too. No real good comes out of it.

You gladly take "stand by" on "WISH-I-HAD" airlines. More time to feel bad. The passenger had a special deal this year. It was a short flight. He carried his own baggage - memories of what might have been. He just could not shake them off. People from all over the world were in the terminal. It was one of the busiest weekends at Regret City International Airport.

Misery sure does love company.

The most popular hotel was booked to capacity. Some of the leading citizens would attend the Annual Pity Party in the Last Resort Hotel. It is one of those parties you don't want to miss. The society page reporter covers the event and you can't wait to tell your sad story.

Once you have been to one of these parties you have been to them all. You see some of the same people year in and year out. Like the Done family. A small family that carries a lot of weight. They include, Should Have, Would Have and Could have. You could spend all evening listening to them.

Maybe you'll be interrupted

by the Wish clan or the Opportunities - Missed and Lost. The grand prize this year goes to the Yesterdays. They brought the most family members and had the saddest stories of all.

And don't forget the Shattered Dreams family and their cousins, It's Their Fault. They own all the excuses for what could have been and why they failed. Don't Blame Me and I Couldn't Help It are the supporting cast.

Depressing isn't it. Stop the flight! How do you turn this life around?

The passenger has since left the City of Regret, realizing he cannot undo his past mistakes. He has stepped out of the quicksand of "shoulda, woulda, if I coulda," and charted a new direction. He is starting over again. He has new friends, the Forgive Myselfs and the New Starts and a "New Attitude" as Patti would say. He lives on "I-CAN-DO-IT" street now.

"Ultimate freedom," says Victor Frankel, "is man's right to choose his attitude."

A "pity party" can be canceled at any time. Don't show up. You are in control if you choose to be. You can't change yesterday, but you do have the power to make today a wonderful day. Who will you be and what are you going to do about it today?

"Sing Patti, Patti."

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PJs are offensive

Guest Columnist Malcolm Marshall

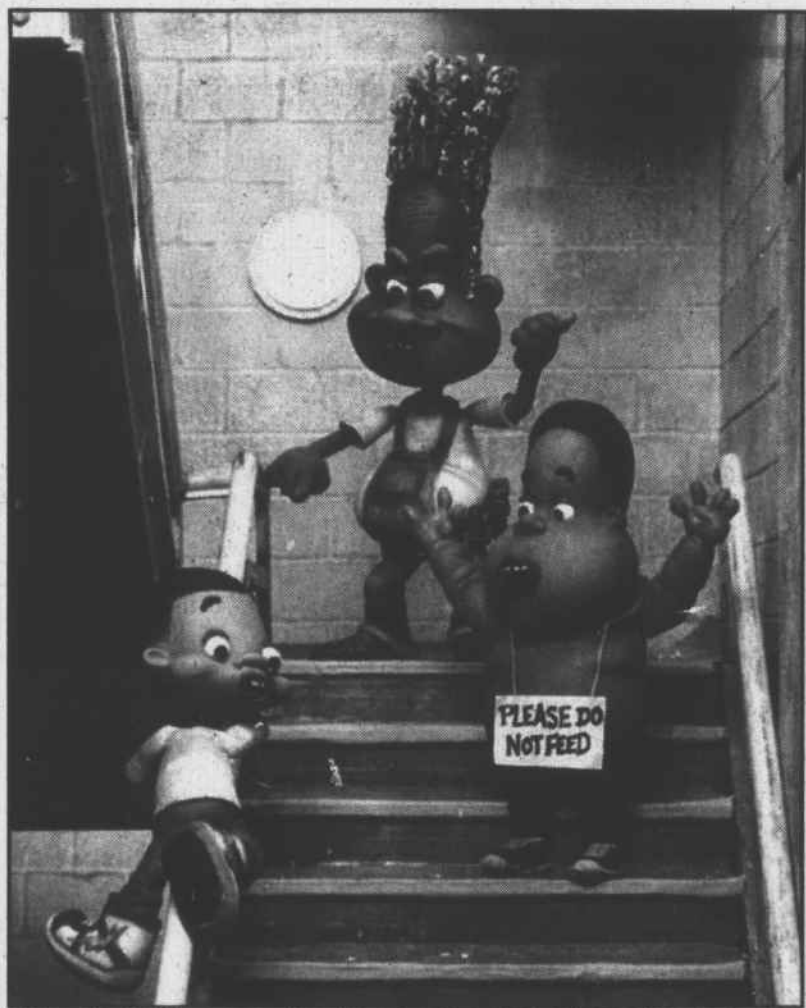
insult to every American black or white, and especially those who live in our nation's federal housing projects. This show should never have made it onto the television screen. Not since "Goodtimes" a show aired during the 1970s, has a show been so detrimental to African Americans. "Goodtimes" gave mainstream America the idea that minorities enjoyed the ghetto lifestyles. The only positive aspect for "Goodtimes" was the fact that it gave many African American performers jobs.

However, African American entertainment has come a long way since then.

"The PJs" have animated characters who glorify living in roach-infested tenements. The show relies on the stereotypical beliefs that African American males are lazy, malt liquor-drinking, chitterling-eating adults. Females are shown as obese, mean and insensitive, while the children are given idiotic nicknames like "Juicy" and "T Dog."

In many scenes the characters are shown to be non-readers not even recognizing their own names in print. Others are crack heads, drug dealers and gang members.

There is nothing positive that young people can learn from this show. It infuriates me to think that a show of this caliber can be shown in 1999, and it saddens me more to know that Eddie Murphy is affiliated with humiliation and degradation. Maybe Eddie Murphy has become so wealthy that he can no longer relate to the misery of those trapped on the bot-



Rife with "toilet humor," and barbs about sensitive subjects, the PJs have stirred a whirlwind of controversy. Already several advertisers have pulled their support from the half-hour foamation comedy.

tom of America's economic ladder.

It is my hope that other concerned citizens, black and white, help put this script where it

belongs - in the bottom of the nearest garbage can.

Malcolm Marshall is a resident of Winston-Salem.

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