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LIVING WELL

THE REPOSITORY
 Responsible for this section:
 Gary Brown,
 living section editor
 gary.brown@cantonrep.com
 (330) 580-8303

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ON THE WEB: Follow food writer Saimi Bergmann's adventures as a teacher in Korea in her blog, A Broad Abroad. VISIT CANTONREP.COM

SECTION D



LOOKING AT LIFE
GARY BROWN

WATCHING PHELPS BRINGS BACK RACE MEMORIES OF MY OWN

It seems I swim like Michael Phelps. Sort of.

You've probably heard how Phelps got water under his swim goggles during the finals of the 200-meter butterfly event in the Summer Olympics — one of the eight events in which he won a gold medal. But he continued to swim, pretty much blindly. And he still finished, winning a gold medal in world record time.

The exact same thing happened to me the one time I entered a swimming race ... minus the parts about the Olympics, the gold medal and the world record.

ON COMPANY TIME

Mine wasn't an Olympic event, it was a corporate competition. In fact, they even called the series of community athletic events the Corporate Cup. Employees of dozens of companies were pitted against each other in mostly team events until Corporate Cup winners were determined in large- and small-company divisions.

Basketball was one of the events, which is why the average height of workers in many companies shot up dramatically. Tug-of-war was another event, which may be why so many companies started to offer company-paid buffet meals — to boost both corporate morale and company bulk.

I wouldn't say people were coerced into participating in the competitions, but they were encouraged to enter races in which they showed talent.

"Hey, we've seen how fast you run out of this place at the end of the work day. You can compete in the sprint events ..."

During the first Corporate Cup, somebody made me a swimmer.

I grew up by a lake.

I owned a boat.

"Throw him in the water and see if he floats."

DAY OF EVENT

I bought myself a pair of those little goggles I'd seen swimmers wear on "Wide World of Sports." I went to the YMCA pool to work out only once, and didn't stay long. No sense in peaking too soon.

Then on the Saturday morning they held the swimming events, I stepped up onto the starting platform at the end of the lane in which my company was swimming. I was to be the first swimmer competing for my team. I leaned forward, first poised and then falling, so fortunately the gun sounded.

My face hit the water. The goggles slipped down into my mouth. But I already was swimming, in a blindly thrashing sort of way.

I quickly found a guy can swim without looking if he doesn't mind weaving back and forth, bouncing off the lane markers, until he hits his head on the other end of the pool.

It's a little difficult to breathe, however, with the goggles in your mouth, like a horse's bit. So part of the way back down my lane I stopped swimming, pulled the goggles down over my neck — why hadn't I thought of this before? — and then tried to finish my leg of the race without anybody noticing I was in the pool.

The other guys on the team congratulated me with enthusiastic backslaps when I crawled out.

"We thought for sure you were going to drown! We placed bets."

Living through your event. It's a small victory. So I can more or less relate to what happened to Phelps. Except I only did it once.



FRANKIE NO. 1
A ballpark favorite in the 1950s



REPOSITORY JIM HILLIBISH



FRANKIE IN THE 1970S
Note the disco-elf shoes

FRANKIE

THE KEENER ... WIENER

How a jingle helped cook up a Stark County icon

BY JIM HILLIBISH
JIM.HILLIBISH@CANTONREP.COM

"I'm Frankie the keener ... wiener."

We grew up with this jingle jangling in our brains. Just when we got it out of mind, we'd hear it on Indians radio or Dick Goddard's TV weather.

And then we'd have to have a hot dog, extra mustard, please.

It is a perfect jingle — memorable, cute and outlandish, a singing wiener which we then, like cannibals, eat. It's almost too much to digest in 30 seconds.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

We chanced upon a recording engineer, video artist and composer who lent a hand to the mayhem. He's Reynold Weidenaar, and he's not terribly fond of hot dogs.

The Frankie song was composed for Superior Provision Co. of Massillon sometime in the early 1950s. His history is as foggy as a wiener steamer. Nobody recalls the author.

"At that time, nobody apparently thought he would become iconic," says Superior's publicist Kristen Clemmer. In fact, Frankie would sell millions of hot dogs for the Stark County meat processor and perhaps is the county's most recognizable logo.

Frankie began life as a crude cartoon drawing appearing on each package of Superior's wieners. He became so popular, kids started calling the hot dogs "Frankies," and Superior's awarded him top billing.

Frankie over the years morphed into a stylized, winking sausage in a chef's hat and blue sneakers.

BECOMING A STAR

Superior's management in 1969 headed to Cleveland's Audio Recording Studios with a copy of the tune. Weidenaar was the recording engineer there.

"We did thousands of commercials for radio and TV. I thought Frankie was charming, even though I wasn't a big fan of hot

dogs," he said.

Weidenaar often used stock music from their library. Frankie was a fresh newcomer and a fun job.

"The whole thing about commercials is they are a slice of Americana. They're the way we view ourselves. Good ones make us smile," he says.

Frankie was a good one. Weidenaar was smitten by the vocals and made a copy for himself.

Later on, this became electronic art, a composition he called "Wiener" starring the Cleveland Institute of Music Contemporary Ensemble. It debuted in 1974.

Frankie here was no stock jingle. Weidenaar began the audio journey with 12 harpists. He then "deconstructed" the

Frankie notes with "much razor blade editing, tape delay, echo and a toy piano."

The result is a very surprising yet compelling rendition of the Keener Wiener, ending tragically.

"The sound of Frankie spattering on the floor was made using domestic, canned tomatoes and a seven-inch cardboard tape box," Weidenaar says.

MATTERS OF BUSINESS

Superior's was forward thinking on the Frankie jingle. In 1963, Oscar Mayer responded to the challenge with "Oh, I Wish I Were an Oscar Mayer Wiener." The hot-dog jingle war was joined and continues 45 years later.

For Weidenaar, the jingles were a living. He wrote the electronic music behind the TV Guide spots that ran weekly from 1969 to 1981.

"I got a royalty every time it ran, and that put me through college," he said.

His commercial credits include Sohio, Sears Optical, Ohio Bell, All detergent and the folkloric "Soulman" sequence on "The Houlihan and Big Chuck Show" in 1973.

He recorded the twice weekly Cleveland orchestra concerts at Severance Hall that were radio syndicated for many years. That



REYNOLD WEIDENAAR

was a challenge.

"I sweated blood. We made notes during rehearsals on the sound settings and recorded them live at the concerts. They had to be perfect."

He was one of the first artists to use the Moog music synthesizer with an array of switches and dials connected to a keyboard.

"Musicians hearing it turned white. They thought they were no longer needed," he said.

Weidenaar continued his music career as a professor at the Cleveland Institute, New York University and William Paterson University. His videos have won numerous awards at film festivals. His playlist includes 3,000 titles.

He retired five years ago and is busy doing "high-cardiac training, weightlifting and ballroom dancing with my wife, Joyce." Joyce is a former stand-up comic.

Every so often, he recalls "The fun to eat treat from Superior's Meats."

And no, he doesn't reach for a keener wiener.

HAVE A LISTEN

"Frankie" jingle:
www.superiorsbrand.com/Frankie.aspx

"The Wiener" by Reynold Weidenaar
 (Click on Funny Tape Pieces)
www.magneticmusic.ws/