

Saturday neighbors

Minneapolis Tribune

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

3B

GEORGE GERSHWIN
Score by Ferd. Grofé



Saturday
February 17, 1979
1B.



Larry Batson

Morris Chargo has skipped wide-eyed and innocent just ahead of disaster many times during his 70 years. His bar mitzvah, for instance, was not elaborate and may have set a mark for brevity. It was in a barn in a village near Kiev. "My mother and uncle watched the prayer and the shawl part, then we all started running," Chargo said. "Some Bolsheviks were coming."

This was right after the Russian Revolution and bands of various factions competing for control of the Ukraine roved the countryside. They were united on one thing, Chargo noted, "killing Jews." He can show you saber scars on his legs.

Chargo made it to this country, eventually established himself in the produce business at Willmar, Minn., and really began living dangerously. He led a dance band for more than 20 years, even though he couldn't read music, play an instrument or sing. "To this day people all over that part of the country will swear that I was a combination of Harry James and Lawrence Welk. I would pick up a fiddle, saxophone, accordion and fake it while the guy behind me played."



Morris Chargo

He got into the band business backwards. He bought radio time to advertise his business, read his own spots and played records. "Then a guy said, 'Why not use live music? We can play and maybe we can get some jobs out of it.' Well, they started getting jobs, but the people wanted me to come along. I had to have something to do besides talk."

People who know Chargo told me to ask him about the circus train, so I did. "The Tiger Business," he calls it, a radio broadcast 30 years ago this month that southwestern Minnesotans still laugh about.

"I'm a nice guy," he said, "just a little dumb. That's how I got to be the poor girl's Orson Welles."

"Man's," Chargo's wife Sophie corrected, "poor man's."

"So? What can you expect from three months night school?" Chargo responded.

The Tiger Business happened when Chargo innocently tried to cheer up a hospitalized friend, Emil Grams, a railroad detective. "I told him I'd play a big lummox was in hospital with a lousy cold. Out of a clear sky the idea came. That was a winter of blizzards, especially South Dakota, where cattle were starving and people snowbound."

So Chargo spun a yarn about a circus train that dug its way out of the blizzard and stopped in Willmar to feed the animals. Three tigers broke loose, Chargo said, and the heroic Grams killed two with his revolver but was mauled.

Chargo couldn't hear it, but as he spoke, the Willmar fire siren began blowing. "There was a fire at the creamery. You could hear that siren 15 miles out in the country on a cold night and it was 23 below." Those listening to Chargo assumed that it was a wild-animal warning.

It was time for the show's announcer to read a commercial, but for some reason he didn't. "I could see he had a phone in each hand and was talking very excitedly. I wondered why." To fill time, Chargo kept talking. He added a gorilla to the animals on the loose and advised residents to turn out their lights because the animals would be attracted.

Two policemen came into the studio. Chargo started his band on a waltz for Grams and walked into the control booth to find out what was going on.

"Somebody said retract, but I didn't understand. Retract what? A big joke? I told jokes all the time." When Chargo left the studio, armed men were patrolling the streets. The superintendent of the state hospital had recruited 25 more to guard that institution. Meetings had broken up, children had been snatched from the streets and householders were peeping fearfully from their windows.

By the next day people had begun to laugh, with exceptions, of course. "My friend at the state hospital didn't speak to me for months," Chargo said.

Chargo retired in 1974 and moved to Hopkins. He still gets a letter now and then about the Tiger Business.



Staff Photos / Mike Zerby

Graham's driver Cam Haugland, 22: "We've been threatened with guns. People call up and say they're going to kill all the Graham's drivers."

Meet the folks who haul your car away; 'Right down there with dog catchers'

By Tom Sorensen
Staff Writer

Most of the time, Cam Haugland is easy to like. He works hard, smiles often, is nice to his girlfriend and doesn't drink after work. But Haugland, 22, does have a nasty habit.

At least two days a week, he dons coveralls and a down-filled jacket, tucks his black hair beneath a stocking cap and slides behind the wheel of a Graham's tow truck. Once he turns on the engine, he turns off a good share

of Minneapolis residents.

In 1978, Graham's Towing Services, 3200 Nicollet Av., hauled more than 13,000 illegally parked cars from south Minneapolis streets. The city's other big towing service, Koehler's Towing Service, 1307 University Av. SE., pulled almost 10,000 automobiles from the city's northern, southeastern and downtown streets.

Graham's and Koehler's are the only firms that bid for the city's towing contract.

"They've got a monopoly," said Minneapolis police Sgt. Robert Beckers, supervisor of the city's auto unit. Beckers said that only Graham's and Koehler's have enough space to store 600 cars, which the city contract requires. Koehler's has four lots for impounded vehicles, Graham's three. "There are suburban towing companies that are big enough, but how would people feel about going out to Fridley to pick up their cars?" asked Beckers. "With the price of land being what it is these days, what other towing companies can afford to find enough space to

qualify for the contract?"

Both firms raised their prices Dec. 1, the day after their two-year city contracts expired. That means the next time Haugland or somebody like him tows your car into a Graham's lot because of a parking violation, it's going to cost you \$21.50 for the tow, an automatic \$3 for storage and \$4 for every day you wait to pick up your car. (Koehler's rate increase is \$1 lower.) Under the old contracts, Graham's

Towing continued on page 2B

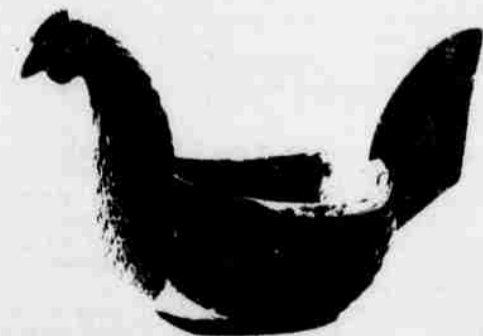


Harold Stange drives for Koehler's, one of the biggies.



Cam Haugland drives for Graham's, the other Minneapolis biggie.

If you're looking for family fun...

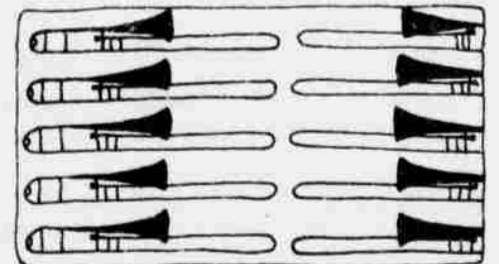


There's a fjord in your fjuture

"The Art of Norway 1750-1914" opens at 2400 Sunday at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2000 Third Av. S. If you haven't yet heard of this highly regarded exhibit, you will, you will. It continues at the institute through April 1. "The Art of Norway" features 260 works of folk art, applied art and painting. In connection with the exhibit, at 2 p.m. Sunday, the director of Oslo's Norsk Folkemuseum will tell the story of that most unusual museum. And at 3 p.m. three musicians will play piano and flute music of Edvard Grieg. All at the institute. The institute is open from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$1 for adults and 50 cents for students, with children and senior citizens admitted free.

It'll never happen here

Did you know that the Minneapolis park board "closes" all city skating rinks when the temperature drops to 20° below zero Fahrenheit? But not to worry; it'll never get that cold again this winter. The subject of skating rinks comes to mind because of the park board's Annual Midwinter Fest, now in progress (started yesterday, continues through next Saturday). Best way to find out what's happening is to look under Minneapolis Park Building Telephones on page 854 of your telephone directory and call the park nearest you for information. (Heavens to Betsy, don't dial 411 for the phone number!) A few of today's events: Senior Citizen Tournaments (bridge, 500, cribbage and shuffleboard) from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Logan Community Center, Broadway and Monroe Sts. NE. Senior Citizen dance, 1 to 4 p.m., at Logan. (Old-time music by Leon Bonrud and his Bavarians. Free admission.) Senior king and queen coronation, 3 p.m., Logan. On Sunday: Family skating party, 3:45 to 5 p.m., Parade Ice Garden, 600 Kenwood Pkwy. Free admission. Bring your own skates or rent them for 75 cents a pair (or 37½ cents apiece). Other Midwinter Fest Events during the week include free hayrides, an ice fishing contest, a jogging race, a super heroes party, rollerskating party, trip to see "Superman, the Movie," skiing and more. Call those park buildings for information. Keep those telephones ringing.



No trouble here in River City

Here's the answer: "Because it's a wind instrument." Can you figure out the question? While you're thinking about it, be advised that the Minneapolis Trombone Choir will present its fourth annual concert at 3 p.m. Sunday at Judson Memorial Baptist Church, 4101 Harriet Av. S. This concert features 25 professional trombonists, who will play music ranging from classical to jazz. Should be fun. No admission charge. Now the question: "Why is a trombone like a politician?"

More family fun / 6B