

Spring arrives with optimism

A quick glance through my trusty Norman Rockwell engagement book for mid to late March through April is enough to give a whole new meaning to the word eclectic.

For surely no other time of year offers such a mixed bag of sacred celebrations, traditional revelry and significant seasonal shifts than this. It all got underway with the annual St. Patrick's Day fete a few weeks back, the one day of the year when honorary Irish citizenship is freely granted and eagerly accepted.

The first day of spring followed three days later, with the past Sunday one of those ecumenical stews which saw Christians acknowledge Palm Sunday while Jews attended Purim carnivals.

This weekend will see churches everywhere filled as believers commemorate that most hallowed of Christian observances, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Ironically, just two days afterwards on Tuesday, the naive among us will be falling for reports of such things as bullet trains between neighboring towns as April Fools Day falls again. Then it's time to push the clocks ahead for the long awaited return of daylight savings time.

April 22 sees the celebration of Passover, with members of our household getting to chow down two nights in a row at Seders being put on by both



From where I live

Bruce Stapley

sides of my wife Susan's family as they once again recall the freedom from slavery experienced so long ago by their ancestors.

It's also Earth Day, a time for the ecologically minded among us to drive home the message of the ultimate fragility of this planet with which we have been entrusted.

If one was to try and find a common thread to this hodgepodge of solemnity, frivolity and seasonal change, I suppose it would involve the realization that life is indeed a mixed bag. Sacred tradition, joyful revelry, and rebirth as demonstrated by the annual arrival of spring often combine to help offset the daily grind. The longer one lives, the more one comes to appreciate the need to celebrate the good while enduring the inevitable losses we are forced to suffer.

Just last week, within the span of a

few days, I listened to the sad tales of three brave people relating stories of the tragedy and affliction that had come their way since the last time winter turned to spring. They involved the death of an infant baby, a life threatening disease contracted by a mother already dealing with her daughter's attempt to rebuild her life after a car accident killed her husband, and a friend who contemplated suicide mere months after suffering a near fatal stroke. In all three cases, however, there was an underlying optimism, a willingness to look ahead to a new beginning despite the need to deal with a pain that wouldn't go away.

My wife and I occasionally kid our four-and-a-half-year-old son Drew for failing to pick up on the times when we pull his leg in jest. More than once we've told him with some seriousness that learning to laugh is a trait that will not only add to his enjoyment of life, but will possibly contribute to its length as well.

I think he's catching on. When I cheerily informed him of the official coming of spring last week, he just looked out the window at all the snow still piled high on either side of the driveway and smiled.

"You're kidding, right Dad?" he said with a definite chuckle.

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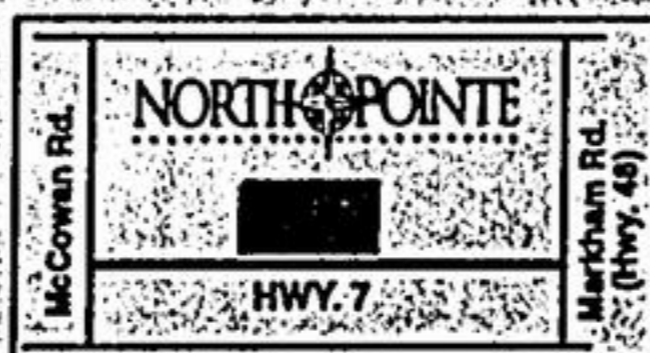
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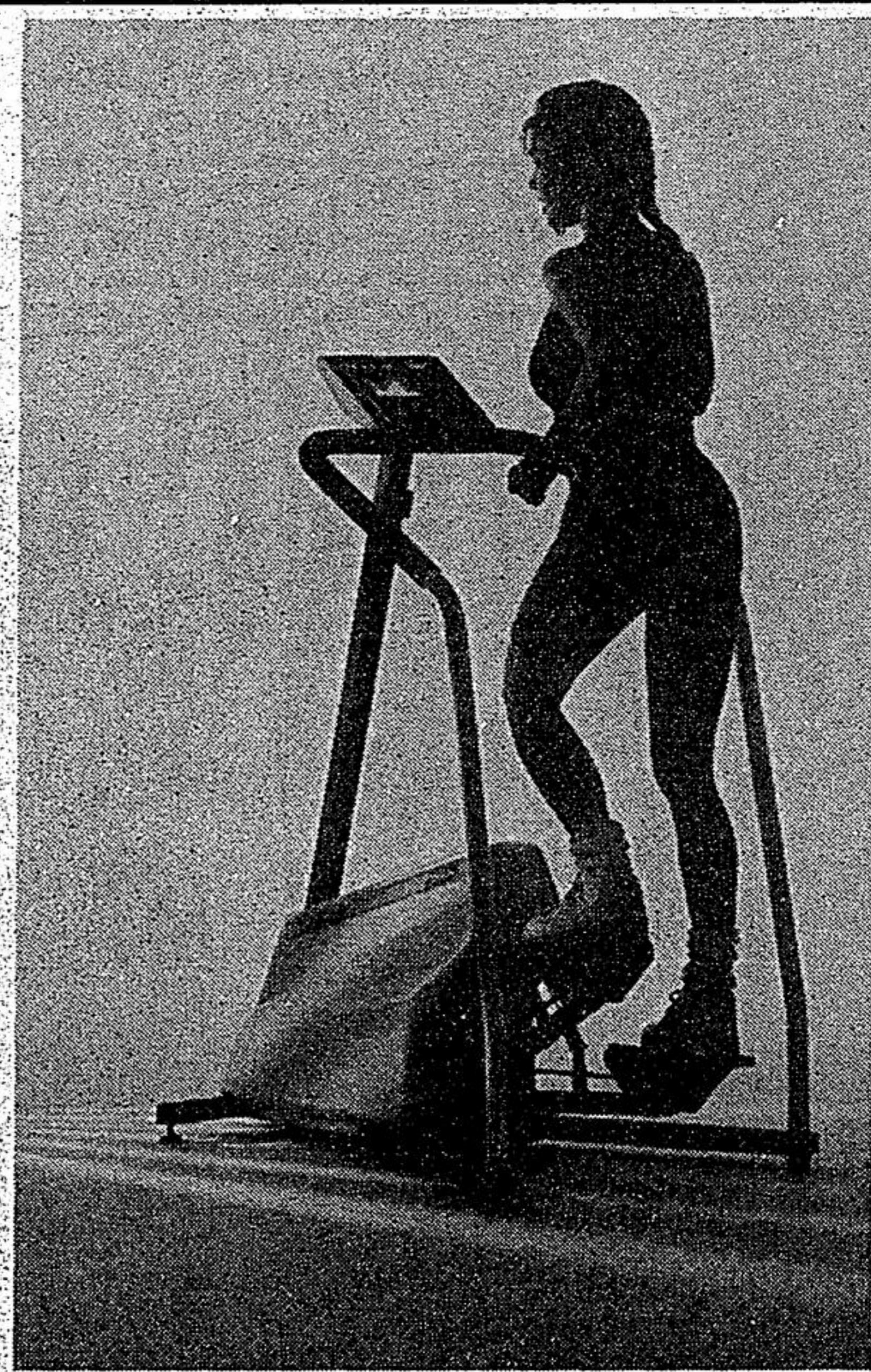
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