

# He's too old for the draft anyway

By PASQUALE MARRANZINO

JIM GERNHART CAN RELAX, his birthday, Nov. 20, came up 185th out of the fishbowl lottery conducted by the draft people.

In actual years his birthday came up 93 and he celebrated it royally as he always does at the home of the Kenneth Keelers in Burlington where he has been living and farming for 80 years.



Marranzino

He said Theresa Keeler baked him a lemon cake and Mrs. Art Mange came through with a chocolate one covered with walnuts.

What makes Jim even safer from the draft is that he is a "corpse". You may recall that in 1951 when Jim was a robust 78 he decided he would stage his own funeral.

"I don't want to be buried like a dog," he said, "and them relatives I cordially detest would be running around throwing my money away."

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JIM ESTIMATED he had a bankroll that would amount to 75 grand—give or take a few. He put out what he said was \$25,000 for the first funeral. He shopped around and bought a coffin he said cost \$4,000 and spent another \$2,500 on a fine granite monument for the grave he purchased. Then he tried to hire the school hall for the wake, but they refused him so he hired a hall.

Jim hired the Burlington Armory, secured the services of a minister from Kansas, bought flowers and hired some Burlington housewives to cook a home-made farm meal which was served to 1,200 who showed up for the services.

He sat by the open casket while the minister intoned the good things about his life while solemn funeral music played in the background. The 1,200 persons who attended took the minister at his word when he exhorted them not to mourn too deeply.

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THE FUNERAL WORKED so well, Jim had a repeat the next year, but by then his funeral had become costly and was eating into his savings. Then, too, he got a bushel of proposals from lonely women who wanted to comfort him in his seer and yellow leaf. He compromised by buying an electric blanket.

About two years after the funeral, Jim threw the tax assessor out of the house when he discovered the coffin in the cellar. He taxed Jim for \$4,000 and Jim had to get a bill of sale from the mortician saying he had paid a paltry \$1,250 for the casket.

At that, with the high cost of living and dying, Jim saved a lot of money on the casket and the 2½-ton monument.

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JIM SAID THAT he still gets an occasional proposal and "dates" a girl now and then. He takes about 19 vitamins a day and managed to paint his farm house and to trim all of his fruit trees before the October snows hit.

He still writes with a steady hand and has never used glasses. Chances are he will hit the century mark the way he is going and I wish him 93 more.