

# Darwin Twine Ball Museum

Cleveland Press – Jan. 7, 1971

## What did I say?

By BETTY VOLK

To ten-year-olds a parent's words are Truth, no questions asked. At twelve some doubts creep in; experiments begin. Fourteen to twenty-one, wisdom is theirs; they scorn the moldy counseling of age. Let freedom ring.

Parenthood . . . We tried. Sometimes we made mistakes. Among the daily crop of do's and don'ts we hope we planted some few priceless gems. We tried.

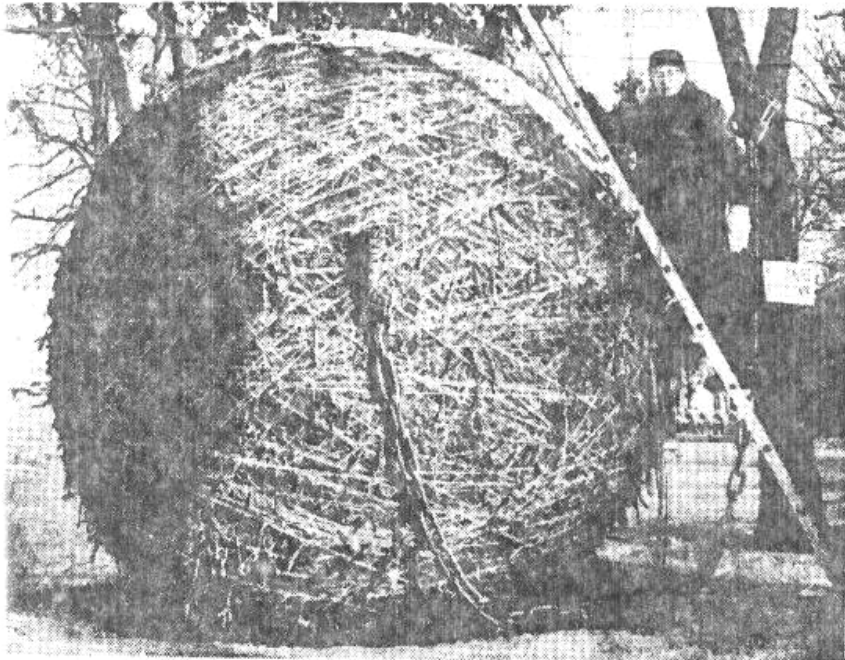
Curiously, and wondrously, And sometimes fearsomely, we hear our words come back from children now adult. They were not wholly deaf as we had often thought, those childhood years. Some of our words lay dormant in their minds, but lived. And so it was with Francis A. At forty-six his mother's maxim awakened in his mind: waste not, want not. Obsessively, though late he started saving twine. In twenty years four tons of windings grew into a ball taller by twice than he; immovable except by tugging with a mighty chain; unreachable except by ladder's height; unusable, symbolic as it was of thrift.

He should not waste. From these few words evolved this legacy, this monstrous ball of twine, this huge, unwieldy monument to Mom.

Its keeper aging now, what will become of its vast bulk, when dedication lags? Will he bequeath his work to heirs, and will they cherish it? Will finally this awkward heritage crowd from their homestead those who keep the faith? Or will they, scornful, mock, put torch to it, And fiddle while it burns?

How awesome, and how frightening, how permanent the tricky, temporary craft of parenthood. What ball of twine have I unwittingly implanted in the minds of offspring of my own, perhaps to hand intact to generations yet unborn, unto millenium? Dear Lord, I pray no weighty, unintended hex hangs albatross-like from their hapless necks. Dear Lord—those do's and don'ts I flung their way—those casual random words—what did I say?

The Cleveland Press, Thursday, January 7, 1971



Betty Volk's column (below) was inspired by this picture of Francis A. Johnson, 66, of Darwin, Minn. which appeared in The Press. Johnson has been collecting bailing twine since 1950 because his mother taught him not to waste anything. The ball is 11 feet in diameter and has 4½ tons of twine in it. (UPI)

**TWINE BALL.** Many people seem to know that someone in America created the world's largest twine ball, but few know that two separate balls vied for the distinction. The creation of Francis Johnson of Darwin, Minn., rightfully holds the title. Johnson's twine ball is 12 feet in circumference and weighs some 10½ tons.

But this should take nothing away from the 1,600,000 feet of twine amassed by Frank Stoeber. His ball was more than 11 feet in circumference, and to the naked eye there is little difference between the two. Stoeber died before he could overtake Johnson. Stoeber's home town of Cawker City, Kan., decided to preserve the effort, and the second-largest ball of twine now sits along that town's main street, protected from the Kansas sun by a wooden gazebo.

In other words, it might have been a tie . . . but it was knot.

Wilkins is a San Francisco writer and co-author of "Roadside America," published by Simon & Schuster's Fireside Books.

WORDS BY WIRE

7/5/87 PD