

WAY  
BACK  
WHEN

## Think Togetherness Is A New Invention?

BY VERA MILLER



TWO women met on Morse avenue. Both were carrying shopping bags from the grocery store. One had two little boys with her. During the exchange of niceties and polite inquiry into the health of the daughters-in-law and various mishpacha, the two little boys, aged 3½ and 5, were toe-twirling and trying the ancient art of getting a mound of ants back into the sidewalk crevice.

As is well known, if you step on an ant it will rain tomorrow, and no one wants to be blamed for that.

Finally, the time of leave-taking; and one woman turned to the other and said, "Sadie, I should like for you to meet mine ainikel. This is David, the doctor, and this is Steven, the lawyer!"

As in yesteryear, each male is born a "something." You've got to be "something." Only the method of accomplishment in the family differs; the end result is usually the same. However, no matter what talent finally emerges, everyone agrees they saw it all the time.

Today, parents face the realities of life. David goes to nursery school. On the day of registration, when the family is laid open for financial and social inspection in answer to the three pages of questions so that the child will be understood, David has taken his first formal step toward becoming the scientific genius of the family.

Questioning further reveals that he showed great scientific leanings in his aptitude with Pla-Skool toys, eating habits, toilet habits and the fact he was raised on Dr. Spock. (Mixing bleach and Oxydol in the nursery school toilet further substantiates this before the interview is over.)

This is the beginning of togetherness between David, the home, and his educational future. David's parents discuss his various subjects and carefully control his attitudes and those of his teacher.

During the semester the teacher must stay at school on the night of open house. The moulding above the blackboard is hung with various talents representative of the group, and should David excel in arithmetic and by chance have a spelling paper displayed instead, polite interrogation is made of the teacher as to why his mathematical prowess is not on display so as to encourage his scientific leanings.

His desk is minutely examined for proper light placement, closeness to the desk of the teacher and proximity to that of the problem child of the class, who causes David no small concern in his efforts to concentrate solidly from 8 to 3. This togetherness continues on

through high school and oft times spells the difference between TV or no TV for the week.

Remember when Ma and Pa went to school? Once, to make their mark on the kindergarten admittance card (or to painstakingly write out the full name), and then to attend the *grajushkun*. How many parents in those days galloped off to school when there was a problem? Any misdemeanor meant the older brother or sister or upstairs lady was called to school.

Punishment was meted out by the eldest child, of course, unbeknownst to Ma and Pa. Dragging the luckless child by the elbow, you walked up the gray back-porch stairs, wiped the laced-to-the-ankles shoes on the well-worn torn rag mat and called out: "Ma, the kids in the next block were picking on him again!" There were always the "kids on the next block."

Much *oy vay-ing*, much tea drinking from the hexagon-shaped glasses and a couple of poppy-seeded round cookies while the guilty one was nightingaled to complete recovery. This sort of made up for the pounding received as punishment in the alley or behind the hardware store.

When the eldest was embarrassed by having to go to the younger family member's room, no child psychology was employed to learn where the problem originated. The eldest, judge and jury, solved the problem.

Disgrace of school misbehavior must not be entered into the home life. Besides the *klops* in the alley, with the thought of no recriminations from Ma and Pa, there was usually the week in which the younger one had to walk to school on the other side of the street.

Nowadays a student is absent when and if there is an appointment for the orthodontist, a virus infection, when the rag weed is in bloom and when there is a reaction to penicillin.

Remember the absence-excuses of way back when? You were absent because you had to "help in the store," when the folks had to stay at the store and someone in the family needed tending to, or when you went to the clinic to get a new cast for a broken shoulder blade.

Absences were excusable to attend a funeral. Do you remember a time when the teacher came into the store to offer Ma and Pa condolences, and as you stood there hoping the floor would open, you thanked the powers above that Ma and Pa would not show a sign of disrespect by questioning the teacher's thinking behind the offer of condolences?