

The Importance of People

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IT'S COLD INSIDE

I am 3 years old. I had my picture taken today. My brothers watched, then they teased me. My mother held me in her arms for a long time.

I am 6 years old. My father plays with me sometimes, but I don't see much of him because when he is at home he spends most of his time with my two older brothers. My mother is with me a lot. She likes to run her fingers through my hair. Her women friends say I am a beautiful child. Mother thinks I am "delicate," so she is not going to send me to school next fall.

I am 8 years old. This year mother let me go to school, but not the public school. Mother taught me to read and write at home, so they put me in the "upper primary" room. There are more girls than boys there, but they are all nice and I like them, except for one or two of the boys who call me "Curly Locks" and "Sissy." I asked the teacher to make them stop doing this, and she spoke to them. Now they don't say anything to me. I like the clay modeling best of all we do in school, and I like to hear the teacher read stories. I like two of the girls and play at their home a lot. Mother is worried because I am thin, so I don't get to stay after school for the games they have then.

I am 11 years old and in the sixth grade. This year I go to the public school where my brothers went. Some of the teachers remember them, and tell me they are glad I am not always getting into trouble. I could have been in the seventh grade this year, but was sick a lot last year so mother didn't want me to have to work too hard in school. I am younger than most of the boys in the class, but am as tall as any of them. All the school work is easy for me, except arithmetic. That book makes me tired to look at it. Mother

says I take after her—she never had a head for figures.

There is another boy in the room that I like. He wears glasses and is very different from me except that he likes to read. He is very strong and is good in all the games. He is getting up a football team and asked me to play end because I am tall, but mother wouldn't let me. She says it is enough for two of her boys to risk their necks. My brothers play on the high school team. Some of the girls in my room are nice but most of the boys don't like any of them. If it wasn't for Roger, my friend, I would have more trouble, because there is a gang of boys that pick on me sometimes as I walk home from school.

I am 13 years old and I guess they are going to let me graduate from eighth grade this June, even if my marks in arithmetic are low. My last two teachers say they will be glad to get rid of me in this school, and I guess I'll be glad to go. School bores me to death.

There are just two things I like besides Roger. One is my chemistry and photography lab I've fixed up at home. The other is the secret club they let me into last year. In the club we have six fellows, and we have built a shack in our woods at the back of one of the fellow's house. We have meetings there and cook our own meals when we can sneak enough stuff from home. One of the boys is old—he is 18—and has a car, so I am learning to drive. It gives me a big thrill to step all the way down on the gas and then see how fast I can make her go around the curves.

The kids in our club call me Skinny. Nobody calls me "Curly Locks" anymore since I knocked a kid unconscious with a rock for calling me that on the playground at school. It scared me at first, what I'd done. It scared me when the policeman came, too, but I got out of that O. K. and the boys don't fool

around and kid me anymore about my looks, so the whole thing was to the good. I had to laugh when the principal called my dad about it and got bawled out for not tending to his business on the playground. In our shack we have a lot of drawings I have made of different teachers in school. I made one of the principal getting spanked by my dad. It shows him crying big tears like he wanted to make me do, and saying, "Please let me off."

I am 17, and in the third high school I have attended since we moved from our home town. In all of them it's been the same old story. The kids call me "Pretty Boy" and I get licked most of the time when I fight them for it. The teachers most generally start out by being real nice and end up complaining because I don't do my work on time. Once in a while I say something in class that makes the teachers pay attention. Most of the time it isn't worth the bother to say anything.

I guess I'm no good, like my oldest brother. But maybe I can do big things some day and show everybody. I know one thing, there isn't anybody in town who knows more about jazz, or how to drive a car, or about Ambrose Bierce. Sometimes I feel as if I could be a great musician, or a writer who would tear out people's hearts with the things I would say. Sometimes I think I could be a great engineer or designer of airplanes. Dad thinks I'm no good. Mother just feels bad about me and doesn't say much. If it wasn't for the gang at the pool room I wouldn't belong anywhere, really.

I am 20 years old. It seems funny to look back on my life and realize what a lot of time I've wasted worrying about things that didn't matter. War is mostly dirty hard, lousy, hell, but in combat I've proved that I can take it as much as anybody. If I get

through this, maybe I'll go back to college and take that engineering course. If they'll let me in. If they won't treat me like a kid. If there is anything left that's worth doing.

I used to wish for a lot of things. Mainly I wanted to be myself. At home things were too easy for me—but they were too hard in another way. It's hard to express what I mean because I always wished mother wouldn't baby me and I always wished father and my brothers would pay more attention to me.

In school things were never very good. I wasted my own time and that of everybody else. School was like a prison to me and the teachers, most of them, were too busy to care about me except when they were sore at me. I guess the things that were wrong were mostly my fault, but I sure did have a lot of troubles, or thought I did. I didn't like to fight but I seemed to get in fights all the time. I used to wish somebody would help me figure it out, but I never wanted to talk about it, either. People might laugh at the things that worried me.

Now I'm in the biggest fight of all—I guess nations don't know how to settle things much better than I did. I also know that everybody in my outfit has his troubles and that's a help. It's not just me. And now that I know that I can take it, it's a lot easier. But I'm not so sure about the future. Maybe I'm too ignorant to make good in civilian life, no matter how hard I try.

I wish there was some school to go where they would help me size things up for myself, not make fun of me or flunk me for what I don't know. I wish they would let me find out how to earn a living by doing things in drawing or chemistry or something I like. But maybe that's an impossible wish. Probably schools can't take the trouble to treat each person as a special case. And I don't want any special favors anyhow. I can just keep on fighting it out. I sure hope I can.

HIGHLIGHTS . . .

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<i>Committee</i>	<i>Chairman</i>
Studies in Secondary Education	William Brown
Bibliography on Elementary Education	Walter Anderson and E. T. McSwain
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Democratic Education (a radio project)	Margaret Hampel
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