

The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham

MUST HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?

SIX-YEAR-OLD Sue had learned the lesson only after a series of bumps, jars, and heartaches, but she had learned it. She knew a little girl couldn't have a comfortable, happy time in the world if she always insisted on having her own way. Sometimes one had to do what grown-ups said to do, even if it didn't make sense, and sometimes one had to take turns with playmates and share toys.

But now she faced a new situation, and the rules of the former lesson didn't fit. The situation was this. Sue's mother said she must wear woolen underwear which scratched all over and had long knit legs that bulged beneath her stockings. Sue hated this underwear, but she had learned that one must obey one's mother on occasion, and this seemed to be such an occasion. So far so good. The rules applied. But when she went to school, the other children pointed to her chubby wool-encased legs and laughed, and invented terrible names for her such as "Wooly-legs" and "Long-drawers Sue." The sit-

uation was intolerable. There was only one solution. Each morning she stopped behind Mr. Emerson's barn and pulled the offending underwear up above her knees, and each afternoon she repeated the process in reverse. During the day at school the underwear made strange bulges which caused her to walk with an odd waddle, but at least the horrid names were stopped.

Sue lived in terror, on the one hand lest her mother discover that she went to school with the underwear legs pulled up, and on the other, lest the boys and girls discover the bulges above her knees.

Twelve-year-old Sue faced a type of problem she now recognized as perennial.



Wooly-legs

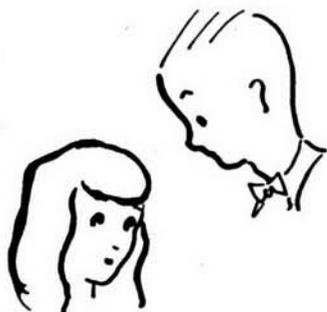


Thin ice

The ice on the skating pond had been judged too thin for safety. Her father had said she must not go skating. The other girls had said, "Come on, Sue. Don't be a scare-cat baby!" If she didn't go,

the girls would laugh at her, and maybe refuse to play with her thereafter. If she did, her father might find out, and he'd be furious. She went. Somehow the ice held. Miraculously, her father never found out, but it was weeks before Sue dared draw a breath without fear.

Fifteen-year-old Sue faced the same old quandary. Her mother said she was too young to kiss her 'date' good-night. But if she didn't, the boys might think she was unsophisticated, and never ask for further



To kiss or not to kiss

dates. Awful, awful thought! She kissed the boy-of-the-evening good-night. Her mother never knew. She was asked for further dates.

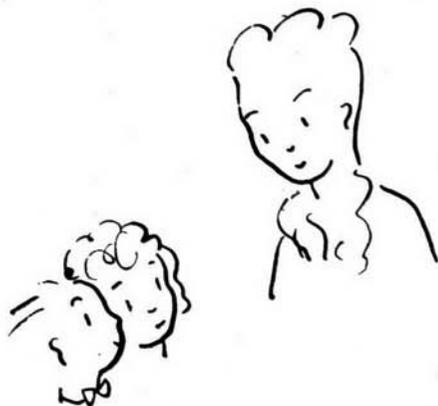
By this time Sue had developed a philosophy. Adults are kill-joys who make meaningless rules. The most important thing is to go with the crowd. Nine times out of ten one can get by with defiance of adults. The tenth time is chalked up to bad luck.

Let's stop a minute, and look at Sue. Is she healthy and normal? It would seem so. She has made a satisfactory transfer from parental dependence to peer relationships and self-direction. But what is the next step?

Sue's boy friend Jim decided that the nine-times-out-of-ten rule applied to all authority. First he defied the law by lifting items from the counters of the five-and-ten cent store. Next he tried speeding. Then it was more serious theft, and finally a hold-up of a gas station which proved to be the bad-luck time, and earned him a stretch in the "pen."

The same could easily have happened to Sue. Perhaps it was more good luck than good management that led her to other types of behavior, less serious before the law.

Twenty-two-year-old Sue was a teacher in a junior high school. The youngsters



Teacher Sue

learned to trust and admire her. She found out that boys and girls required by their parents to be home at eight o'clock or earlier every evening were dutifully presenting themselves to their families at the required time, then sneaking out for secret rendezvous at forbidden hours and in forbidden places. This time Sue's problem had a new twist. She discovered that in place of the authority of adults, she had a conscience to contend with. How she had acquired that conscience, she didn't know, and few people—educators, psychologists, or psychiatrist—would be able to tell her. But there it was. If she "told on" the youngsters, she would lose their trust and affection; if she didn't, her conscience would bother her—same old dilemma in a new dress.

This time, however, she faced the dilemma with a new maturity. She attempted to analyze it. She realized that she faced the problem of a culture conflict—peer culture vs. adult culture. She recognized that such a conflict had caused the difficulty when she had trouble with long underwear, with ice-skating, and with

kissing the boys. Did history have to repeat itself?

She asked herself what one does in the face of culture conflicts. She dug back in her mind to what she had learned in college courses in anthropology and psychology. She looked at current culture conflicts and our modern methods of trying to resolve them through war or United Nations. The answer was always the same. In a civilized world, culture conflicts are resolved through meetings, discussions, reason and mutual agreements. It made sense.

* * *

The meeting was a great success. Everyone said so—boys, girls, parents, teachers, other community leaders. There had been some hot discussion and some tense moments, but a decision had been reached

—a compromise decision perhaps, but one to which all could agree. All junior high school boys and girls would be at home by eight-thirty or earlier on school nights and Sundays, and by ten-thirty on Fridays and Saturdays. Very special occasions, such as certain all-school parties, would warrant an eleven-thirty hour, at the decision of a joint parent-pupil council.

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Sue smiled happily as she turned out the bed-side light that night after the meeting. "It's funny," she said to herself, "how we can have fine ideals about resolving conflicts on an international scale and forget to use the same methods at home. Talking things over and reaching mutual agreement works for kids and adults in our community just as it does for the world. History doesn't need to repeat itself!"



And so to bed

Workshop Designing

(Continued from page 463)

a workshop becomes a year-'round job. No university teaching is so time-consuming, no university teaching takes as much energy, but no university teaching quite compares with this type of planned and functioning university workshop. The expressions of student

enthusiasm, signs of student appreciation, carry-over into school and classroom, and opportunity for desirable continuing human relations with fine teachers are dividends university teachers seek and too often fail to realize from traditional teaching procedures.

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