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A Few Good Words In the Interests Of Pure Silence

By Robert Reilly

Noise is finally getting some attention.

Noise, of course, has always been a problem in urban civilizations (Caesar banned chariot riding at night). But what is hard to explain today are the willful efforts to augment noise. It is as if the noise pollution from industry, airplanes, cars and frost-free refrigerators was not enough.

Modern man must also begin his day with radio noise to wake him up, have a car radio or tape deck to carry him to work, continue with Muzak in the elevator and office and "on hold" on the telephone, relax by the jukebox at the bar and conclude his day with televised newzack. Those who cannot sleep in the silence that descends when the TV is shut off now resort to machines which produce something called "white noise."

TV, radio, stereo, etc. can be the vehicles for great drama, beautiful music or even salvific words. But who can claim that for the vast majority of people these devices are anything other than the agents of noise? They are not listened to; they are simply heard. Constant noise is not even noticed. It is like the air we breathe, made obvious to us only by its absence. Silence, in this way, has become like a vacuum which modern man abhors. He fears he will implode in it.

* * *

Silence is no longer seen as normal or as good in itself. It is understood only as an absence, a lack of noise. Before noise (B.N.) there were sounds, distinguishable from noise, because sounds came out of silence. Silence was the background for sounds. City dwellers, awash in constant noise, become very nervous in the country because the sounds of the country—from crickets, birds and animals—are made against the background of silence. There is also less talk in the country, not because people are slower there, but because words are spoken out of the silence.

To interrupt the silence one must have something to say. Words are not part of the general noise as they are in the city, where one can say anything in order not to stop talking. Silence in the city is always interpreted as awkwardness. It is embarrassing not to be talking, not to be part of the noise. There seems to be a fear that if the noise stops, so will everything else. The city will collapse in the silence. This is why parks are no longer a refuge of silence in the city. People seem to be afraid to go to the park without their radios or portable home-entertainment centers.

Before the days of widespread TV, a Swiss thinker, Max Picard, offered the novel notion that people play the radio to make sure they are still really there. Radio noise reassures modern man that he exists. This proposition neatly reverses the old conundrum: If a tree falls in a forest, does it make a sound if there is no one there to hear it? This question presumes man exists and asks if sound can exist without man's hearing it. The modern formulation of this question, a la Picard, would reverse these presumptions and have modern man asking: If there is no noise, do I really exist? If there is no noise, how do I know I am really here?

* * *

The reader may think that this is pushing a point too far. The point, of course, is that modern man has substituted the ersatz reality of the media for reality itself, that he is left in a sort of existential crisis without the media. But I recall a recent survey of the effects of TV which concluded that people who live in neighborhoods which have been televised feel a lower level of anxiety than those who do not. The reason is that, having seen their neighborhoods on TV, these people feel a surer sense of their neighborhoods' existence.

Solitude and silence are the crucibles of serious thought. To flee them is to flee the necessary conditions for that examination of one's life that makes it worth living. It is to flee as well that peace that can only come from the orientation of one's life to the ultimate realities, the realities that can only intrude upon one when one is still and quiet and open to them.

I am often told that people turn on the radio and TV because they are lonely. Noise is used as tonic for loneliness. It is an aural busyness which prevents reflection. It is an acoustic drug. But loneliness is a longing for something which should not be drowned in noise. If one quietly searches one's loneliness, one can begin to ask why one is lonely and for what? Loneliness lets us know that we really have nothing adequate to our deepest longings—not in our friends, not in our family, nor in our worldly goods or pleasures. In what then or in whom are we to find the object of our deepest desire? This is perhaps the most important question that can be asked, and it can only be answered in silence.

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The moral meaning of the family

STANLEY HAUERWAS

BY THE TIME you read this, the saga of the White House Conference on the Family will have come to an end. What had once seemed like a politically welcome and inoffensive project—who could be opposed to strengthening the American family?—was marked from the start by bitter squabbles over staffing, procedure, and agenda. Catholic lobbying eliminated the original candidate to head the Conference staff. A conservative "pro-family coalition" suspected the whole operation of cloaking a further assault on the traditional family by liberal social engineers. Pro-choice and pro-life activists clashed at state conventions, and some states dropped out of the delegate-selection process altogether. The pro-family coalition walked out of the first of the Conference's three meetings, in Baltimore; and a contretemps at the second meeting, in Minneapolis, caused both Catholic Charities and the U.S. Catholic Conference to withdraw from the moderate-to-liberal Coalition for the White House Conference.

Like the earlier state conventions, both these meetings could agree on some recommendations: flexibility in working hours and employment policies so as to support parental responsibility; repeal of the higher federal tax "penalty" for working married couples; increases in the housing supply; tax credits for families who care for aged relatives at home; recognition for social security and tax purposes of the economic value of homemaking and caring for children; and, in fact, a whole shopping list of other items. Yet even here, votes were often close; the issues of abortion, homosexual rights, and ERA were never far away; and the final recommendations seemed a little like a thin layer of scar tissue over the very deep wounds.

The premise for the White House Conference was that the family is "in crisis"—a premise commonly advanced, first, by the observation that the family is a very good thing, and, then, by the familiar recitation of divorce statistics, examples of wife- and child-beating, rates of delinquency, claims of women's liberation, evidences of rising immorality and self-centered hedonism. By saving the family, it is implied, we can save our society. Of course, others have suggested that the very idea that the family is in crisis is a mistake, one besetting those who cannot distinguish crisis from change. In spite of everything, it is pointed out, people seem to end living together and some even have children. The rising divorce rate does not necessarily indicate that the family has broken down. The fact that an extremely high percentage of the divorced remarry may indeed suggest just the opposite. They even seem to remarry individuals remarkably like their former spouses. The family, in spite of indications to the contrary, remains a tough institution not easily defeated. Could it be that those who decry the loss of familial relationships are only arbitrarily asserting a preference for one style of family constellation over others?

What the whole saga of the White House Conference demonstrated, if demonstration was necessary, is that the central issue is not really whether the family will continue to exist, but what kind of family should exist and what moral presuppositions are necessary to form and sustain it. The fact is, the most divisive question of all at these meetings was the very *definition* of the family. It might once have been thought a poor minimum—but one inevitable in a morally pluralistic society—to content ourselves with the Census Bureau definition of the family as "a group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption." Even that, it turns out, proved controversial, with some Conference participants wanting to close a "loophole" by adding "heterosexual" before "marriage," and others worried that the definition excluded "single-person families," homosexual couples, and alternative "structures and lifestyles."

In these terms, it does make sense to suggest that we are in a crisis: our problem is that we no longer can describe what the family should be and/or why we should think of it as our most basic moral institution.

Because we have all had an experience of family and most of us are involved in families, it seems bizarre to suggest that we do not know what our involvement means. I am suggesting that we lack the moral and linguistic resources to express adequately what happened to us and what we do in families. More importantly, I am convinced that the moral language of our culture actually tends to distort the very experience we are trying to describe.

Ethicists, moreover, will provide little help in recovering the experience of the family. For modern ethical reflection, the family is simply an anomaly, a curiosity left over from previous ages. From the "moral point of view," identification with relatives appears at best a sentimental attachment, but more

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likely an irrational commitment. Nowhere in contemporary ethical literature is there a discussion of the simple but fundamental assumption that we have a responsibility to our own children which overrides responsibility to children who are not ours. Although a powerful assumption, there is no adequate account in contemporary ethical reflection of why we hold it or if it is justified. Instead, the best my colleagues can offer is the doubtful thesis that children ought to have rights.

It is no surprise, therefore, that one of the few questions disconcerting to the Notre Dame students who take my course on Marriage and the Family is, "What reason would you give why one should be willing to have children?" They say "children are fun," or "children are an expression of a couple's love," or "it is just the thing to do"; but they clearly doubt that any of these is an adequate basis for having, much less knowing how to raise, children. Their often unexpressed doubt seems to me to illustrate the depth of the crisis concerning the family: we lack a moral account of why we commit ourselves to having children, some normative sense of what it means to be a parent.

Therefore the problem with the kind of naive approach marking not only the White House Conference but much other discussion of the family is that it continues to assume that we all know what we mean when we say the family is a good thing. The moral issue then appears to be that we are not living up to the standards of what we all know to be good. But that simply fails to confront our inability to describe or evaluate "family." Indeed I suspect one of the reasons we so extol the value of the family is because we are so unsure of its worth. We attempt to substitute rhetoric for substance and are thus unable to deal with the obvious shortcomings of the institution.

IN THIS RESPECT I think we are a little like Augustus in one of the episodes of Masterpiece Theater's *I, Claudius*. Like many political reformers and radicals since, Augustus was particularly conservative about personal and familial morality. He believed strongly that the traditional Roman family, which literally placed all power in the hands of the patriarch, was the backbone of the state. Thus he was outraged when he discovered that his daughter had entertained half of Rome in her bed, and that her lovers had come from senatorial families.

In a marvelous scene we see Augustus calling his daughter's lovers before him and lecturing them on the depth of their immorality. His concern was not only that they had been willing to sleep with his daughter, but that they had betrayed their political duty by failing to begin families of their own. Instead of dallying with his daughter, they should be fulfilling their duty as Romans by providing Rome with sons.

Augustus's speech is ironic, because while he no doubt believed everything he was saying, as emperor he was also engaged in policies whose clear result was to weaken the Roman family. Just as he continued to say the senate ruled while systematically stripping it of its power, so he continued to believe in the family but also would not allow it to be, as it had in the past, an independent commonwealth within the state. As Robert Nisbet has pointed out, in earlier times families bore responsibility for most independent offenses; but under Augustus individuals were punished (directly by the state) as if they had no family. Even more important, Augustus changed inheritance laws so that individuals might own property apart from family membership.

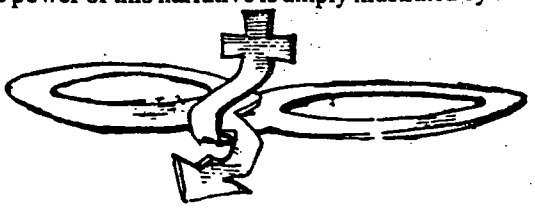
Now I say we resemble Augustus somewhat because we want to retain the fiction that we hold dear the family while adhering to disharmonious convictions and policies that militate against the family. In the classic words of Pogo, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." We are inheritors of a history which has rendered the family a highly questionable institution.

This is not the place for me to recount this history. Indeed, I am aware that there is nothing more problematic than historical claims about how the family has changed. Most of us, though, have been influenced by a sociological rendition of what has happened to the family that is useful to recall. In the past the family was large, extended, and patriarchal, but this has been replaced by the nuclear family. This smaller and more democratic family, as a result of growing specialization of social and economic functions, has lost the economic, protective, and educational functions of the traditional family. In the process the family has taken on a more profound and rewarding purpose—namely, it now specializes in emotions.

This new form of family is a correlative of the requirements of industrial society. Christopher Lasch explains this view: "Whereas kinship served as the unifying principle of earlier forms of society, the modern social order rests on impersonal, rational, and 'universalistic' forms of solidarity. In a competitive and highly mobile society the extended family has no place. The nuclear family, on the other hand, serves industrial society as a necessary refuge. It provides adults with an escape from the competitive pressures of the market, while at the same time it equips the young with the inner resources to master those pressures." The nuclear family, according to Edward Shorter, is not characterized by how many people are living under the same roof but by the privileged emotional climate that must be protected from outside intrusion.

This historical account has been challenged by those who insist that the nuclear family was present before the industrial revolution. But aside from whether this particular account is historically or sociologically correct in every detail, it has begun to serve as a normative justification for our understanding of the family. We use this allegedly descriptive account to justify our assumption that the family should be understood as the prime locus of love and intimacy in our society. At the same time, we tend to see the development of the nuclear family as part of the continuing story of freedom, a break from the "feudal" or "tribal" institutions of the past.

The power of this narrative is amply illustrated by how it has



led us to forget that the family has traditionally not been rooted in contract but biology—namely, its core function has been providing human continuity through reproduction and child rearing. As Robert Nisbet reminds us, few people have ever let something as important as the need for future generations rest on anything as fragile as the emotion of love. "Even if we assume that in most places at most times a majority of spouses knew something akin to passionate love, however fleetingly, the great strength of the family has everywhere been consanguineal rather than conjugal. And here, not affection, but duty, obligation, honor, mutual aid, and protection have been the key elements."

Nisbet argues, therefore, that it is not sexual immorality, the revolt of the youth, or women's liberation that has weakened the family, but rather the loss of economic, political, and moral functions of the family that have generated the former. Contrary to the expectation that this might have been accidental, the very moral convictions linked to the history recounted above necessarily had this result. For family kinship has always been an anomaly for the liberal tradition. Only if human beings can be separated in a substantial degree from kinship can they be free individuals subject to egalitarian policies of our society. Thus we simply assume—and this is an assumption shared alike by political conservative and liberal—that it is more important to be an "autonomous person" than to be a "Hauerwas" or a "Pulaski" or a "Smith." Thus for example, the Supreme Court held in *Planned Parenthood* v. *Danforth* that husbands have no rights if their wives wish an abortion since "abortion is a purely personal right of the woman, and the status of marriage can place no limitation on personal rights." As Paul Ramsey has observed, in spite of our society's alleged interest in the bond of marriage that bond is now understood simply as a contract between individuals who remain as atomistic as before marriage.

In the name of freedom we have created "the individual," who now longs for community in the form of "interpersonal interaction." The family is praised, therefore, in Christopher Lasch's marvelous phrase, as a "haven in a heartless world"—the paradigm of "interpersonal relations." Such a conception of the family assumes, moreover, "a radical separation between work and leisure and between public and private life. The emergence of the nuclear family as the principal form of family life reflected the high value modern society attached to privacy, and the glorification of privacy in turn reflected the devaluation of work." Thus, according to Lasch, relations in the family have come to resemble relations in the rest of the society—namely, a relationship between friendly strangers. "Parents refrain from arbitrarily imposing their wishes on the child, thereby making it clear that authority deserves to be regarded as valid only insofar as it conforms to reason. Yet in the family as elsewhere 'universalistic' standards prove on examination to be illusory." And as a result relations in the family too often become nothing less than power struggles between independent principalities.

In an attempt to defuse the destructiveness of this situation, parents try to raise their children by undervaluing the intensity


Harpur © *Punch*

"We've decided to stay together for your sake."

of family life. By becoming our child's friend we think we can avoid the politics of the family, which are too often the dirtiest politics of all. We know that too often parents make inordinate sacrifices for their children, sacrifices which the parents then use as blackmail. So we assume the way to avoid such strategies is to develop a form of life where no one is asked to sacrifice at all or to suffer for anyone else. We treat our children as equals which, translated, means we place no demands on them. We thus raise our children permissively; because we fear "imposing" our values on them and psychologically damaging them. But by doing so we fail to see that permissiveness is a form of social control that results in the authority of the peer group being substituted for that of the family.

Ironically this kind of family which was justified in the name of intimacy now finds intimacy impossible to sustain. For, as Ferdinand Mount points out, "in a truly intimate relationship one person makes unique claims upon another, claims for services, affection, respect and attention which can be supplied only by that one person." By trying to make the relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, impersonal we try to avoid the demands of intimacy. "Intimacy," writes Mount, "always entails personal authority. The claims of a child for care and love, even if unspoken by child or mother, are just as much a moral authority over his father as the father's claims for filial affection and/or obedience and respect. For authority in this sense does not depend upon inequality nor does it wither away under the beneficent rays of equality. It depends solely upon one person acknowledging another person's right to make claims on him in particular."

The relationship between liberalism and the family is obviously a complex matter requiring a more nuanced argument than I can develop here. However, in brief I am suggesting that the "crisis of the family" does not indicate the *absence* of a moral attitude toward the family, but reflects how the family has increasingly been formed by what in fact are the deepest moral convictions we have about ourselves. Our liberal forefathers assumed that their commitment to the freedom of the individual was consistent with and even supportive of the family. Milton Friedman continues this assumption as he claims that liberals, "take freedom of the individual, or perhaps the family, as our ultimate goal in judging social arrangements. In a society freedom has nothing to say about what an individual does with his freedom; it is not an all-

embracing ethic. Indeed, a major aim of the liberal is to leave the ethical problem for the individual to wrestle with."

But as Robert Paul Wolff has stated, from such a perspective,

> the ties of blood are merely one source among many of the desires whose satisfaction we seek rationally to maximize. One man enjoys eating, and puts his money into fine food; a second races fast cars, and allocates his resources for carburetors and tune-ups; a third man raises children—his own—and he finds himself possessed of the strong desire that they should be happy and healthy. So he puts his resources into their schooling and food and clothing, and spends his spare time with them. If his desire for his children's welfare is stronger than his taste in fine cars or fine food, then rationality will dictate that he spend more on them than on eating and transportation. But if his desire is not essentially different from those of his fellow citizens, the state has no reason to treat his interest in his children as taking precedence over his neighbor's interest in racing cars or fine food.

By accepting this as an account of ourselves, we, the heirs of the liberal tradition, find ourselves bereft of the moral anchor supplied by those particularistic commitments we used to indicate with the word "family."

IF MY ANALYSIS of the moral crisis of the family is even close to being correct, then what we require is a language to help us articulate the experience of the family and the loyalties it represents. Such a language will thus determine how we understand ourselves and our society because the family is integral to the entire culture. Such a language must clearly denote our character as historical beings and how our moral lives are based in particular loyalties and relations. If we are to learn to care for others, we must first learn to care for those we find ourselves joined to by accident of birth. Only then will love be understood, aside from attraction to those who are like us, also as regard and respect for those whom we have not have chosen but to whom we find ourselves tied.

For the most inescapable fact about families, regardless of their different forms and customs, is that we do not choose to be part of them. We do not choose our relatives; they are simply given. * Of course we can like some better than others, but even those we do not like are inextricably ours. To be part of a family is to understand what it means to be "stuck with" a history and a people. Thus we even enjoy telling stories about our often less than admirable kin because such stories help us know what being "stuck with" such a history entails. Unfortunately, we have tended today to understand such story-telling primarily as entertainment (which it surely is) rather than representing the moral affirmation of what it means to be part of a family.

In other words, the family is morally crucial for our existence as the only means we have to bind time. Without the family, and the inter-generational ties involved, we have no way to know what it means to be historic beings. As a result we become determined by rather than determining our histories. Set out in the world with no family, without story of and for the self, we will simply be captured by the reigning ideologies of the day.

* In *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Robert Nozick makes the interesting observation that liberals and radicals have always had an ambiguous relationship to the family since it is not appropriate to enforce across wider society the love and care within a family where such relationships are voluntarily undertaken. Nozick must surely have an odd sense of "voluntary," since the family is anything but "voluntary."

Put differently, we must recover the moral importance of our willingness to have children. Like it or not, the most morally significant thing any of us ever has the opportunity to do is to have children. A child represents our willingness to go on in the face of difficulties, suffering, and in our case, the ambiguity of modern life and is thus our claim that we have something worthwhile to pass on. The refusal to have children can be the ultimate act of despair that often masks the deepest kind of self-hate and disgust The fear and rejection of parenthood, the tendency to view the family as nothing more than companionable marriage, and the understanding of marriage as one of a series of nonbinding commitments, are but indications that our society has a growing distrust of our ability to deal with the future.

In this respect, the most telling devaluation of the family in *All Our Children*, the much discussed Carnegie Council report on the family written by Kenneth Keniston, is the complete absence of any indication that the family involves more than those ties necessary to raise children. The complex ties of adult children to adult parents simply do not exist from the perspective of the report. It is as though Social Security has removed all responsibility adult children have for parents; and that adult parents can now retire to sunny lands, their responsibilities over when their children are "making it on their own." Any sense that the elderly have a responsibility to share their wisdom with their children or that they have a responsibility to lead decent lives in support of their children has been eradicated by convincing the aged that the one benefit of growing old in a society that has no place for them is freedom from all responsibilities.

Ironically, the loss of any moral role for such older parents is a correlative of the loss of any moral task for younger parents. It is not sufficient to welcome children, for we must also be willing to initiate them into what we think is true and good about human existence. For example, I think we should not admire religious or non-religious parents who fail to educate their children in the parents' convictions. It is a false and bad-faith position to think that we can or should raise our children to "make up their own minds" when they grow up. Children are not without values today; instead, we as parents lack the courage to examine our own lives in a manner that we can know what we pass on is truthful and duty-paid.

Only by recovering this kind of moral confidence will parents deserve to reclaim their claim from the "experts." In matters moral there are no "experts"; and therefore all parents are charged with forming their children's lives according to what they know best. Rather than "experts," there are moral paradigms, guides for us. The task for parents is to direct their children's attention to those paradigms which provide the most compelling sense of what we can and should be.

What, briefly, do I think religous faith has to do with all this? It is not, I think, the usual assumption that the Judeo-Christian tradition keeps people on the straight and narrow sexual path necessary to sustain marriage. On the contrary, my classes on marriage are begun with the observation that both Christianity and marriage teach us that life is not about "happiness." Rather, the Hebrew-Christian tradition helps sustain the virtue of hope in a world which rarely provides evidence that such hope is justified. There may be a secular analogue to such hope, but for those of us who identify with Judaism or Christianity, our continued formation of families is witness to our belief that the falseness of this world is finally bounded by a more profound truth.

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CHILDREN ...and Ourselves

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A DEFENSE OF SCHOOL

MANY years ago, a MANAS contributor had the privilege of auditing a philosophy class at the University of California in Los Angeles. The professor was Ernest Carroll Moore, who will be remembered by some as provost of the university and by others as the author of good books on education. That day, he told about the inhabitants of certain Pacific isles who constructed simple dwellings using the vegetation that was all around. To keep out intruders the islanders would hang an enormous palm leaf over the principal opening. Question: Is it a leaf or a door? Nearly half an hour was spent in ringing the changes on this question. It wasn't very exciting, but the point became unforgettable: Language is a matter of convenience. It doesn't matter so long as people know what you mean. In such case, function is far more important than thing-in-itself.

We have been thinking about this matter lately, because of the continuing argument about schools. Sometimes it seems as though any place at all, if you call it a school, has the mark of the Beast on its lintel. This is where children fail and sometimes die at an early age. But school is also the name of the place where Sylvia Ashton-Warner did so much for generations of Maori and other youngsters. And school is sometimes described as Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.

After all, the reality of a school is metaphysical. The word describes a relationship between people with experience who want to share what they know with people of less experience. This is called "transmission"—passing on practical knowledge from one generation to another, the more or less obvious business of education. But there is another function, difficult to define and presumptuous to claim, that also belongs to the schooling relation. It is to excite both wonder and suspicion, to provoke embarrassing questions and impertinent answers. This function can be courted but not transmitted. It involves a quality which often challenges mere transmission, and people who limit their idea of teaching to repeating what is supposed to be "known" are usually offended by it and try to outlaw its activity.

This habit of being satisfied with the "known" gives schools and education a bad name. It leads to a long list of abuses which have been catalogued by teachers who care about the young, all the way from Leo Tolstoy to John Holt. Yet Tolstoy started a school, and John Holt is a one-man perambulating school, wherever he goes. Holt's mind runs to analogy and illustration, which is the habit, the almost uncontrollable habit, of a good teacher. When we defend schools here, it is the metaphysical idea of a school that we refuse to abandon. The word, we think, can be reclaimed. While the worst crimes there are have been committed in the name of religion, religion, which is the name of a relationship between the individual and the mystery of life, remains all-important to humans, despite the corruption of the forms and practices which are said to represent it. So with the idea of the school.

But why do we need schools in the first place? The birds and the bees don't have them. Well, no. Actually, no one knows enough about the polarities called Nature and Nurture to be sure about such matters. Birds don't need a drill master in order to fly in perfect formation, and fish don't have to have a "stroke" calling out the rhythm of their finny progress. The human sort of learning is a much more problematic task. Something called "dialogue" is required, and probably the best examples of dialogue are to be found in Plato's portrait of Socrates at work in Athens. We humans have to make one decision after another, and when we stop making decisions we're either dead or perfect. So the teacher does two things: He turns the world into a source of instruction in the way things are—which is transmission—and he uses his imagination to provoke questions, questions which may be without answers. Some of his art should be devoted to helping the young to realize that people stop being alive when they no longer wonder about questions that have no answers.

So, the school, if it is true to the role we have assigned it, will be a place where such work goes on, by reason of the people who teach. But few schools are like that. Even the "nice" schools of today are in an administrative straitjacket created by complex economic considerations, not the least of which has been the "consolidation" program which has made big schools out of little ones over the past fifty years or more. Centralization of authority and responsibility has systematically eroded the psychological independence and capacity of teachers, and meanwhile the textbook publishers have made appeal to the national market the guiding editorial principle in planning readers and other texts. The books, in short, are blandly uninteresting. Not many parents recognize this as a disaster for the children, and among those who do, fewer still feel able to do anything about it. Yet some will care so much about the quality of the mental life of their children that they will begin to set an example to other people by teaching their children themselves.

This is the true "beginning of things" so far as human growing and learning are concerned. It is here that the fundamentals become apparent in direct experience, and in a way that one parent or family can describe for other families, so that they can learn to use their freedom in similar ways. This sort of person-to-person collaboration is the foundation of all educational reform, since the institutional barriers are reduced to an absolute minimum. Yet the products of various institutions may be found useful and indispensable. One doesn't start out to change the meaning of education in an ideal, utopian world, but in a world messed up by countless mistakes and compromises and bad habits, and an essential part of change is learning to use available tools and facilities in ways that are better than were intended for them.

Called for is continuous use of the imagination; and, as the Biblical phrase has it, a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

CHILDREN ...and Ourselves

SEPTEMBER 10, 1980

LEARNING IS THE RESULT OF . . .

ONCE again we have evidence that if civilization is worth saving—and it is, of course, since we live in it—then only the mavericks are able to do the job. The evidence this time is a Plowboy Interview with John Holt in *Mother Earth News* for July/August. John Holt is the man who plowed his way to widespread attention among parents with *How Children Fail*, a book based on personal observation which came out in 1964. Holt is no longer trying to reform the schools. He is devoting his energy to encouraging people—parents—to teach their children at home: not the people who won't or can't, but those who can and will. He believes that this is best for the children and will also prove good for the schools.

Holt is a maverick because his thinking is wholly his own. No institution shaped his mind and opinions. At the beginning of the interview Plowboy asked him where he went to school:

Holt: I won't answer that question.

Plowboy: You won't? Did I say something wrong?

Holt: No, but I've come to believe that people's education is as much their private business as is their religion or politics. Let me just say that most of what I know I didn't learn in school, *or* in what people call "learning situations." I don't owe anything to formal education for my love of language, reading, and music. I had those interests before I went to school, I lost a lot of them *in* such institutions, and I've managed to get them back since.

Plowboy: . . . You lost your love for learning *while* you were attending school?

Holt: That's right. Take reading, for instance. I taught myself to read when I was four or five years old . . . even though hardly anybody read aloud to me. I just looked at all the signs on the streets of Manhattan's East Side, where we were living . . . until, one day, I noticed a store that always had shirts in its windows and realized that the letters over that shop must have spelled "laundry"!

That was the first word I taught myself to recognize. I don't remember what the second word was, but I do recall that I liked to read, so I read lots of books that were too hard for me . . . which is the only way anybody gets to be a good reader. I even finished all of *The Three Musketeers* and other classic books of Alexandre Dumas—long, long books—in a single summer when I was about ten.

Plowboy: You must have been a good classroom student.

Holt: Well, I knew how to "Play the Game," so I never had any difficulty with school. But I got bored with it as I got older, and—by the time I reached high school—I wouldn't read a book unless it had been assigned. I didn't start reading again until eight or nine years after I got out of the Navy.

Plowboy: How could going to *school* have changed you so much?

Holt: That's easy to figure out. It's a well-established principle that if you take somebody who's doing something for her or his own pleasure and offer some kind of outside reward for doing it—*and* let the person become accustomed to performing the task *for* that reward—then take the reward away, the individual will *stop* that activity. You can even train nursery school youngsters who love to draw pictures to *stop* drawing them, simply by giving them gold stars or some other little bonus for a couple of months . . . and then removing that artificial "motivation."

In fact, I think our society *expects* schools to get students to the point where they do things only for outside rewards. People who perform tasks for *their* internal reasons are hard to control. Now, I don't think that teachers get up in the morning and say to themselves, "I'm going to go to school today and take away all those young people's internal motivations" . . . but that's exactly what often happens.

The fragments of Holt's biography included in this interview seem especially valuable to the reader. One gets the impression that he, like a great many of the rest of us, grew up with the idea that we live in a great country where we do everything right, and then, after some first-hand experience, began to realize that we are doing a great many things—some of crucial importance—wrong. Schooling is one of the important things.

Plowboy: So you decided that reforming public schools was an impossibility. What did you do next?

Holt: I began advising people who were dissatisfied with traditional education to leave the public system and start their own educational centers. But the almost infinite hassles of forming and running a full-fledged school—and especially the necessary and never-ending search for funds—killed most such efforts.

Finally, I realized that a parent whose objective was to establish a decent learning situation for her or his child might avoid all the fights and struggles involved in trying to reform the public school—*or* to start one from scratch—by moving *directly* to the objective. How? Just teach the child at home.

Holt thinks about 10,000 families in the country are attempting this. He says:

I'm not expecting large numbers right away. After all, when you're blazing a trail, you're necessarily going to attract small numbers of people . . . but the more folks who walk a trail, the easier the path becomes to negotiate. For now, I'm hoping that in three years school districts will start seeing that they should cooperate with the home schoolers so that we can move out of the "combat phase" that we're in now. . . . The truth is the home-schooling movement is good for the schools. We provide, among other things, extremely important educational research. Besides that, if—in the long run—schools are going to have a future, they will eventually have to function as learning and activity centers which more and more people come to voluntarily. . . . And I'd like to emphasize one last point very strongly. People, if you're smart enough to build your own home, design your own solar system, make your own fuel, redesign your car, raise your own food, and do all the things that many *Mother*-readers are doing . . . then you sure as hell are smart enough to teach your own children!

A Plowboy question drew this reply from Holt:

I think that learning is *not* the result of teaching, but of the curiosity and activity of the learner. A teacher's intervention in this process should be mostly to provide the learner with access to the various kinds of places, people, experiences, tools, and books that will correspond with that student's interests . . . answer questions when they're asked . . . and demonstrate physical skills.

I also feel that learning is *not* an activity that's separate from the rest of life. People learn best when they're involved in doing real and valuable work, which requires skill and judgment. These concepts are . . . mirrored in my magazine, *Growing Without Schooling*. . . .

For information about this paper and Holt's books, write him at 308 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

Santa Barbara, Calif., News-Press, Wednesday, September 10, 1980 A-13

Maybe people—not candidates—are problem

By James Reston
N.Y. Times News Service

WASHINGTON — The American people seem to be agreed on at least one thing in this presidential election, namely that they have been asked to choose between a couple of unsatisfactory candidates.

But who asked them? Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan were chosen by a larger democratic vote than ever in the history of the American presidency, and if the people don't like them, they have either to blame themselves or the nominating process.

This, however, is not a very popular subject for debate in this country, for it implies the almost unpatriotic thought that maybe the judgment of the people is not infallible or that the American system for nominating presidents is not very good.

Nothing can be done this year, however, to reform the reforms of the nominating process. We are stuck with Carter or Reagan and can protest against this unhappy choice only by voting for John Anderson and for a bipartisan Government of National Unity that has little chance of being elected. Carter's refusal to face Anderson in the first debate — which may be a major tactical blunder — almost provokes the people to do so.

Meanwhile, there is no hope that Carter or Reagan will oppose the nominating system that has brought them to the top, and it can only make things worse for the people and the press to keep on savaging both Carter and Reagan, and thereby assuring that whoever wins in November will not be able to govern effectively.

The campaign is being fought out on the proposition that the failures of Carter in his first term, and the silly statements Reagan has made in the last 25 years will govern their actions in the future, and therefore disqualify them for the presidency. All these negatives were known by the people who nominated them or didn't take the trouble to vote, but the interesting thing is that both are now reappraising their records and trying to adjust to present problems and future prospects.

What is particularly disturbing about this campaign so far is its emphasis on the manipulative tactics and personalities of the candidates — as if the election of either Carter or Reagan would somehow deal with the staggering and intractable problems of the world and remove the crisis of confidence among the American people in their government.

The shallow and negative argument on both sides is that a competent government and confidence among the people can be restored by rejecting the other guy — that electing Carter or Reagan or keeping Anderson out of the debates would make all that difference. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This is the myth of television politics. Jimmy Carter says he will not debate with John Anderson, at least in the first TV confrontation; but if he insists, he will have to face the wrath of the League of Women Voters, and that could be more formidable than anything else. But these tactical and personal questions are not likely to resolve the problem of how to govern the Republic. For as James L. Sunquist of the Brookings Institution has pointed out recently in a brilliant essay on "The Crisis of Competence in Our National Government," our problems will not be solved by anything so simple as a change of leadership to Reagan or the re-election of Carter.

The American governmental system, Sunquist observes, has built-in structural features that have always presented severe difficulties for any president, but he adds that these obstacles to effective government are not primarily personal but institutional, and will probably be more difficult in the '80s than they were in any other decade of this century.

"One can identify only a few periods in the entire 20th century," says Sunquist, "when relations were close enough or presidential leadership strong enough .... to achieve major innovations in controversial areas of public policy. The most notable of these were the first two years of Woodrow Wilson's administration, when the New Freedom was enacted; the first term of Franklin D. Roosevelt, when the New Deal took form; and the first two years of Lyndon Johnson, when the Great Society was founded. Each of these short but frenziedly active intervals came after a massive presidential (election) landslide, which established the president's credentials as a leader .... "

But clearly, no such landslide by Carter or Reagan is to be expected this year. Neither presides over a unified party. Both have to face congressional rejection of presidential leadership, and even of the leaders of their own parties in the Congress; and neither Carter nor Reagan can do much about this dispersal of political power.

Carter and Reagan are not the authors but the victims of this crisis on how to nominate presidents and enable them to govern. The people have chosen them but they can't blame them for a system beyond their control. There is no point in making Carter and Reagan seem even worse than they are, since they were chosen, as we say, by "the people" who will have to live with one or the other for the next four years.

Jimmy Carter promised in 1976 to produce a government "as good as the American people," and in a way, he kept his promise, but this is not very reassuring.

Wed., Aug. 6, 1980 Los Angeles Times ★

The End Is Near

Medical Care in Nuclear Attack Would Be Overwhelmed—Prevention Is a Must

By HOWARD H. HIATT

Recent talk by public figures about winning or even surviving a nuclear war reflects a widespread failure to appreciate the facts: Any nuclear war would inevitably cause death, disease and suffering of epidemic proportions for which effective medical intervention on any realistic scale would be impossible. This recognition leads to the same conclusion that public-health specialists have reached for such contemporary epidemics as those of lung cancer and heart disease: Prevention is essential for effective control.

What can be said about the kinds of epidemics that would result from the use of nuclear weapons? Two sources of information are available. The first is descriptions of the medical effects of the Hiroshima bomb, dropped 35 years ago today, and the Nagasaki bomb, dropped three days later. The second is several recent and authoritative theoretical projections of the medical effects of bombing American or Soviet cities, toward which the superpowers' respective nuclear weapons are now aimed.

The Hiroshima bomb, equivalent to 20,000 tons of TNT, is estimated to have killed 100,000 out of a total population of 245,000; it destroyed two-thirds of the 90,000 buildings within the city limits. Perhaps even more chilling than the statistics are the descriptions of individual victims. Consider this image presented by John Hersey in his book, "Hiroshima":

> *. . . There were about 20 men . . . all in exactly the same nightmarish state: their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks . . . their mouths were mere swollen, pus-covered wounds, which they could not bear to stretch enough to admit the spout of a teapot . . .*

The effects of a hypothetical nuclear attack on a major American city were described in articles last year in the Scientific American and in 1962 in the New England Journal of Medicine, and were based on studies prepared by the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy and the Atomic Energy Commission. The city's hypothetical disaster begins with a 20-megaton bomb—equivalent to 20 million tons of TNT, 1,000 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb—exploding at ground level in a downtown area and excavating a crater a half-mile in diameter. Even the most heavily reinforced concrete structures would not survive within a four-mile radius —which encompasses most of the hospitals and medical personnel in the area. As far as 15 miles from the blast, all frame buildings would be damaged beyond repair.

The detonation of the bomb would release so much thermal energy that, up to 40 miles away, retinal burns incurred by looking at the fireball would cause blindness. More than 20 miles from the center, the firestorm —fueled by ignited houses, foliage and oil and gasoline storage tanks—would increase the already catastrophic damage caused by the blast.

Among the 3.5 million people in the city and surrounding area, the blast and firestorm would cause 2.2 million fatalities; survivors would be badly burned, blinded and otherwise seriously wounded. Many would be disoriented. The need would be great for medical care, food, water, shelter and clothing, but all are gravely inadequate.

These are the short-term effects. The problems of radiation sickness—including intractable nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, bleeding, hair loss, severe infection and often death—would grow in the period ahead.

How would modern medicine deal with the casualties of a nuclear attack? Hersey described the problem presented to Hiroshima's medical-care system and its capabilities and response:

> *Of 150 doctors in the city, 65 were already dead and most of the rest were wounded. Of 1,780 nurses, 1,654 were dead or too badly hurt to work. In the biggest hospital, that of the Red Cross, only 6 doctors out of 30 were able to function, and only 10 nurses out of more than 200 . . . At least 10,000 of the (city's) wounded made their way to the (Red Cross Hospital), which was altogether unequal to such a trampling . . .*

In the aftermath of a nuclear attack on the American city in question, what are the prospects for medical care? Using as a base a figure of 6,560 physicians in the area at the time of attack, the 1962 study projects that almost 5,000 would be killed immediately or fatally injured, and that only 900 would be in a condition to render postattack medical care. The ratio of injured persons to physicians thus would exceed 1,700 to 1. If a physician spent an average of only 15 minutes with each injured person and worked 16 hours each day, the studies project, it would take 16 to 26 days for each casualty to be seen once.

Thus, it is unrealistic to seriously suggest medical response to the overwhelming health problems that would follow a nuclear attack. Medical measures would be woefully ineffective in dealing with the burden of cancer and genetic defects afflicting survivors and future generations. Radioactivity would make the blast area uninhabitable for months. Most of the area's water supply, sanitation resources and transportation and industrial capacity would be destroyed.

At present, more than 50,000 nuclear weapons are deployed and ready. Many dwarf in destructive power the bomb used against Hiroshima. Sufficient nuclear bombs exist outside the United States to subject every major American city repeatedly to the kind of destruction described above.

One might ask the purpose of detailing such almost unthinkable conditions. But, actually, the conditions are not unthinkable; rather, they are infrequently thought about, much less discussed. Among the painful results of the silence are the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons and the failure to reject nuclear war as a "viable option" in the management of world problems.

If we examine the consequences of nuclear war in medical terms, we must pay heed to the inescapable lesson of contemporary medicine: Where treatment of a disease is ineffective, or where costs are insupportable, attention must be given to prevention. Both conditions apply to the effects of nuclear war: treatment programs would be virtually useless, the costs staggering. Can more compelling arguments be marshaled for a preventive strategy? Perhaps during this election year we might ask that, as one price for our support, all candidates for high office offer their answers to this question. □

Howard H. Hiatt is the dean of Harvard School of Public Health and a professor at Harvard Medical School.

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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A Polish woman's story

Anna Walentynowicz deserves recognition. The experience she has in dealing with an authoritarian communist regime is the sort of mature protest that is reshaping life in Poland.

Mrs. Walentynowicz is 50 years old. She has two children. She has been working in the shipyards of Gdansk for 30 years. She operates a crane.

She watched in horror in 1970 when police fired at striking workers. Then she began to learn that certain peaceable protests could be used to anger the rulers but not incite them to shoot. For instance, each year on the anniversary of the 1970 riots she collects money to buy memorial flowers for those shooting victims. That angers the rulers, but they haven't thought of anything to do about it.

By 1976, Anna was one of the main organizers of the workers' strikes. She was in the small delegation that met that year with the party leader, Edward Gierek. She had learned how to deal. After that she was active in talking with fellow workers about the things that should be their rights. Three weeks ago she was fired. Her fellow workers, by now well indoctrinated in how to protest, quietly argued her case for a week, then just as quietly shut down their machines and walked out.

Anna Walentynowicz' case was just the thing they needed to trigger their whole long list of protests against the party rule that had made them little more than slaves. The strikes quietly spread, and Mrs. Walentynowicz and the 12 others on the workers' coordinating board began to negotiate with the party leaders, showing a dignity, a resolve, and a maturity that has been more than a match for Warsaw and Moscow.

Day after day they have been gaining political, as well as economic, concessions from the dictators in Warsaw, and without any rioting or shouting. The sight of protesting workers in a communist state, sitting quietly on walls, reading newspapers, is something that hasn't been viewed before.

This maturity was remarked on by Tadeusz Walendowski, a Polish underground editor who emigrated to the U.S. last year. He knows the workers' leaders well. In a special article in the New York Times, he described how much things have changed since the revolts of 1970 and 1976. He wrote of "the maturity, confidence and determination" that the workers had acquired. He spoke of the newly-acquired coordination "and political wisdom."

It is the sort of behavior that the Communist Party leaders, both in Warsaw and Moscow, haven't had to confront in any other uprising. Remarkably, the workers' committee yesterday called a temporary halt to the spreading of the strikes, to give the government a few days to try to work its way out of this crisis. When the deputy premier showed up at the shipyard yesterday to talk some more, the workers looked up and politely said, "Good morning."

Anna Walentynowicz and her fellows are showing the world that it is possible to deal with the vulnerabilities of communist dictatorship. It is a hopeful story.