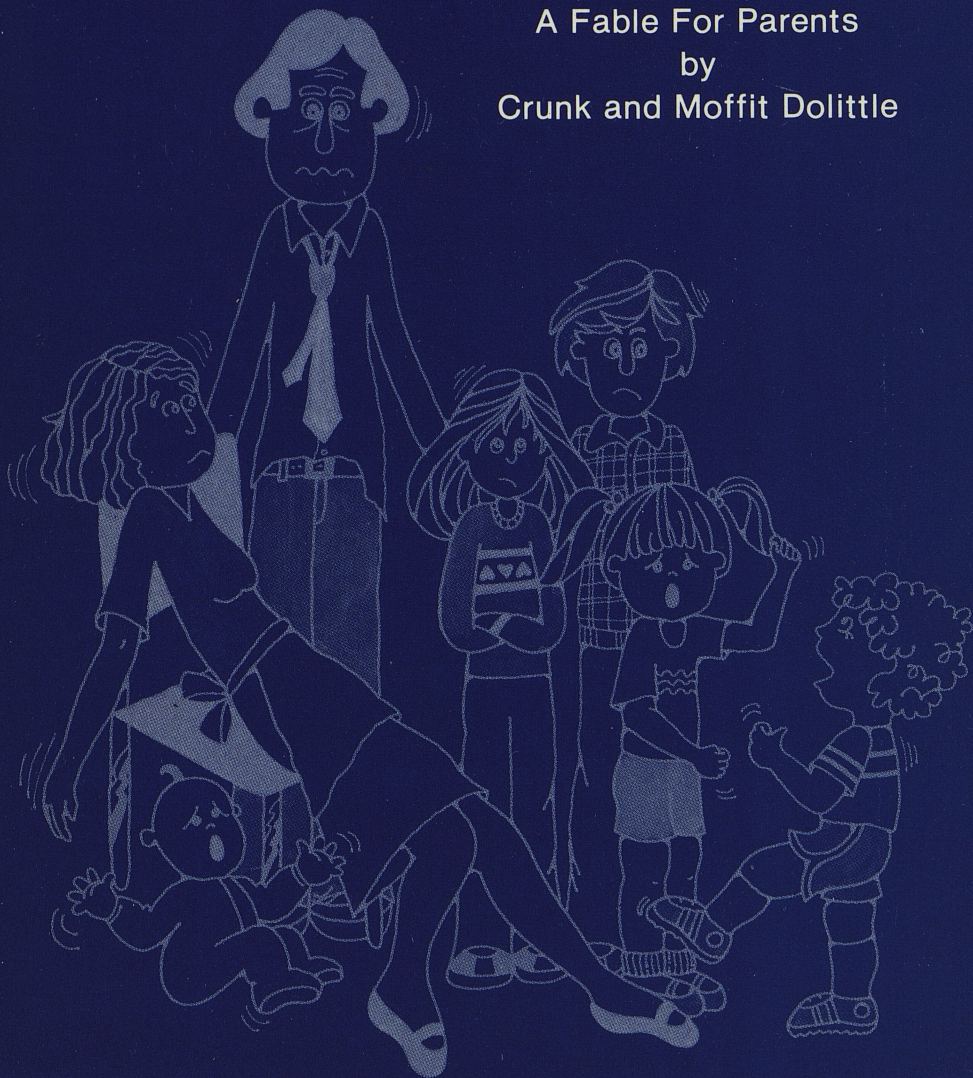


# Mother, Father and the Family That Worked

A Fable For Parents  
by  
Crunk and Moffit Dolittle



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Illustrated by Andrea Sharp Burgon

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# MOTHER, FATHER and the FAMILY THAT WORKED

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by  
Crunk and Moffit Dolittle

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Once there was a family.  
The mother and father of the family  
loved the children of the family with all their hearts.  
They wanted to give them everything.  
But things weren't working.  
There was too much tension in the air, too little peace.  
Mother and father were trying *hard*  
to have a perfect family  
(the kind they had read about in books).  
They were killing themselves trying to make things work,  
and they were getting very *tired*.



Father, you see, was so busy.  
His job was demanding and unpredictable  
and he coached a little league team  
and had a church job  
and was trying to remodel the basement  
and help with the cancer drive  
and start a vegetable garden  
and just generally keep up with everyone else  
and be a “success.”

When he had time for the children he just didn't have  
much mental energy left to go with it.  
His role in the family was either *referee* or *constable*.  
He used his short time and meager energy  
to stop fights and to punish.

Mother was busy too,  
but she had it in her mind that she was going to be  
a perfect mom  
no matter what!  
She pushed herself to bake bread, to keep uplifting things  
on the family bulletin board,  
to smile all the time,  
to make Koolaid for the neighborhood kids after school,  
to see that the kids practiced piano  
and made their beds  
and cleaned their rooms and did their homework  
and saved their money.  
And if they just wouldn't do it, she did it for them.  
And she cut their meat into neat little chunks  
before she put their plate in front of them.

The children were  
“pretty good kids.”  
They usually did what they were told by the fourth  
or fifth time they were asked.  
And they stopped fighting when they sensed that father

was getting nearly mad enough to hurt them.  
They appreciated mother cleaning their room for them  
and driving them everywhere they wanted to go,  
and they told her so too,  
every year on Mothers' Day.

They appreciated Father at least once a week  
when he handed out allowances.

Mother and Father kidded themselves for a long time.  
They told each other that their family was just "normal"  
and that "they would get through it."  
They even pointed out to each other, every chance they got,  
how such-and-such a family had a bigger problem  
than they did  
and how they should be grateful.  
But the fact remained,  
that things were not working.

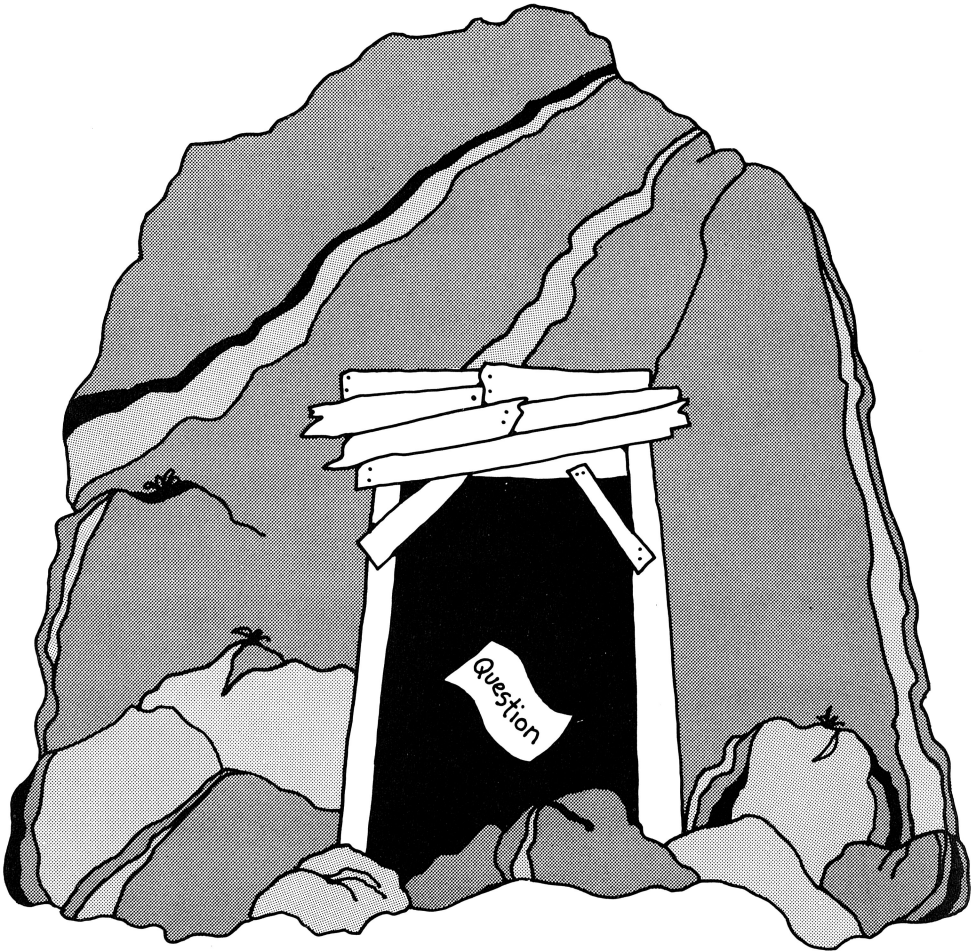
One day Father  
(who prided himself in being a "take charge kind of guy")  
came home to find the house looking like a bomb had hit.  
Mother, for one of the few times in her life, had  
"given up" and was sitting in front of the TV, watching a  
soap opera, her eyes somewhat glazed over.  
The baby was lying nearby, needing a totally new ward-  
robe.

Two of the children were upstairs,  
apparently throwing something heavy.  
The other two were not around.

Father said to himself,  
"We're going to do something about this."  
Later that night, he said the same thing to Mother.  
Mother said, "But *what* dear? I'm doing all I can,  
I just can't do any more."  
Father said (uncharacteristically) "I think we need help."



Now before you read any more of this story, *remember* that it is a fable. Some parts of it may seem pretty close to real life but other parts are symbolic. (You'll need to bear that in mind in order to keep from thinking that the authors are a little dingy as you read the next part.) Of course you may conclude that anyway, despite bearing this in mind.



Father said he had heard of an old mine shaft  
which led deep into a mountain and must have had  
another entrance somewhere  
because there was always an in-draft.  
Loose bits of paper, or feathers,  
or floating dandelion seeds  
were sucked into the shaft  
when they got close to the entrance.  
Father said it sounded crazy but he had heard  
that if you wrote a problem down on a piece of paper and  
let the paper get sucked into the shaft,  
you would get an answer.  
Mother agreed that it sounded crazy and said,  
“Let’s try it.”

They stayed up all night writing down all the  
things they could think of  
that were wrong with their family.  
It was depressing!  
It filled up a medium-sized yellow legal pad.

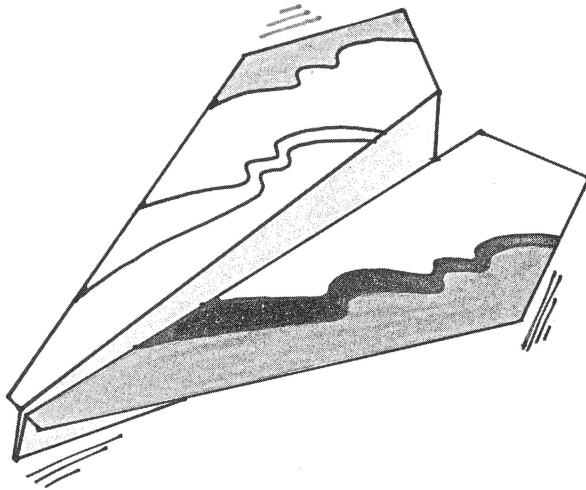
The next day, feeling very foolish,  
Father climbed up to the mine shaft  
and held up the legal pad.  
The in-draft wasn’t strong enough to suck it in.

So he tore off one sheet at a time,  
hoping no forest ranger would appear  
and cite him for littering  
as he let fly one sheet after another.



Nothing happened (relative to the mine shaft that is) for three days.

Then, as father was waiting for the bus, a paper airplane came floating from out of nowhere and poked itself right into his suit jacket pocket. Father, who was a thoughtful and perceptive man, recognized it immediately as the mine shaft's response. He unfolded the airplane and read *"I deal only in principles and never respond to problems that are more than one sentence long."*



Father, never one to be discouraged by delay, forgot about the bus and ran all the way home to try again. He asked Mother to boil the problem down to one sentence. She thought for a moment and said, "Our children fight too much and are disobedient." (Mother was a good simplifier when she put her mind to it.) She added, "That's not the whole problem but it's a pretty good start."

Father wrote her sentence verbatim on a small paper and climbed back to the mine shaft that very evening. The in-draft sucked it in easily.

Three days later, while watering the petunias, Mother noticed a wad of paper floating in her watering can. She took it out and unfolded it in the sun. Though it was soggy, it could still be read.



*“Since behavior is governed by law, children should learn obedience to law and should realize that broken laws precipitate punishment, unavoidable except through repentance.”*

Mother called Father at the office.

Both were excited.

This must be the answer for everything.

A set of family laws. A law to cover every problem.

They did it democratically  
(the making of the family laws).

The children got to put laws they wanted on the list as did Mother and Father.

It was kind of fun and when they were done there was a list of 29 laws, each one made complete by a specific punishment listed next to it.



They put the law list right up on the refrigerator (definitely the place people looked most often) and Father made a major speech about repentance . . . about how a family member, if he broke a law, could sincerely apologize and put right whatever he had broken or gain forgiveness from whomever he had hurt. If he could do all that and promise not to do it again he could avoid the punishment.

And it *worked* . . . sort of.

Behavior did seem to get better and *obedience* was better,

especially when Mother

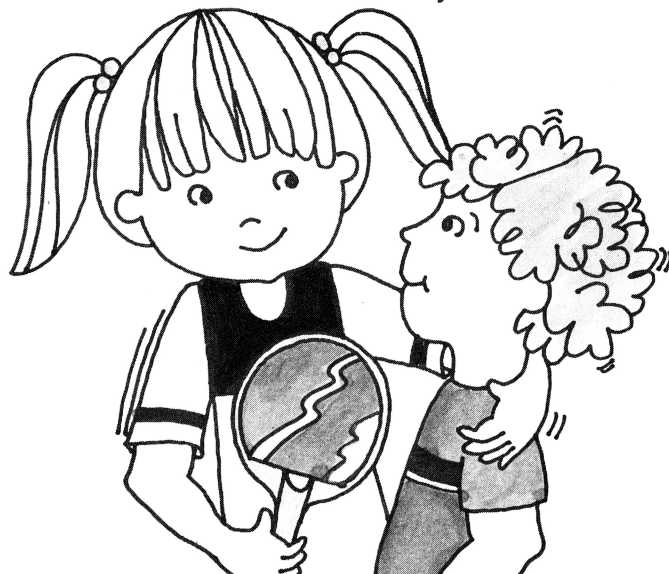
reminded children that “there is a *law* about that.”

The nicest part of all was the repentance.

It may have been motivated by fear, but it was still beautiful when the five-year-old put her arms around the three-year-old and said

“I’m sorry I hit you with the ping pong paddle; I’ll never do it again, will you forgive me?”

It was also beautiful when the three-year-old said “Yes.”



The problem was that the children kept forgetting the laws, sometimes out of lack of memory and sometimes out of convenience. Mother and Father kept reminding them except when *they* forgot one and had to go to the refrigerator to look.

Mother said,  
“You know, I have to tell them what to do as much now as I ever did. I spend all my time and all my breath reminding them of laws.”

Father was feeling the frustration, too, so he decided to go again to the mineshaft. It was easy to get this one into one sentence, in fact it wasn't even a complete sentence.  
“Too many laws, too much reminding, too much hassle over when someone can repent and what the punishment is.”

(By the way, you might notice that, if nothing else, Father is getting more *involved* and more interested in the children at this point, and Mother is starting to realize that something else is needed besides her own untiring efforts.)

Three days later Father was at his office, proofreading some letters, listening to his own voice on the dictaphone. Suddenly there was a pause, and then a very different voice came through the speaker. It said,  
“*Every complexity needs a simplifier.*”

Father and Mother were tempted to go back to the mine shaft and toss in another paper that asked, “So what *is* the simplifier we need?” But they had begun to sense that the mine shaft didn’t work that way. It had given them a principle, and they had to implement it.



After a little thought (they didn’t realize it, but the main thing the mine shaft was doing was getting them to *think*) they were able to simplify their family laws rather dramatically. They came up with four one-word laws:  
PEACE!  
ORDER!  
OBEDIENCE!  
ASKING!

“PEACE!” covered everything from arguing to fighting to yelling.

“ORDER!” covered their room and their things.

“OBEDIENCE!” covered doing what they were told.

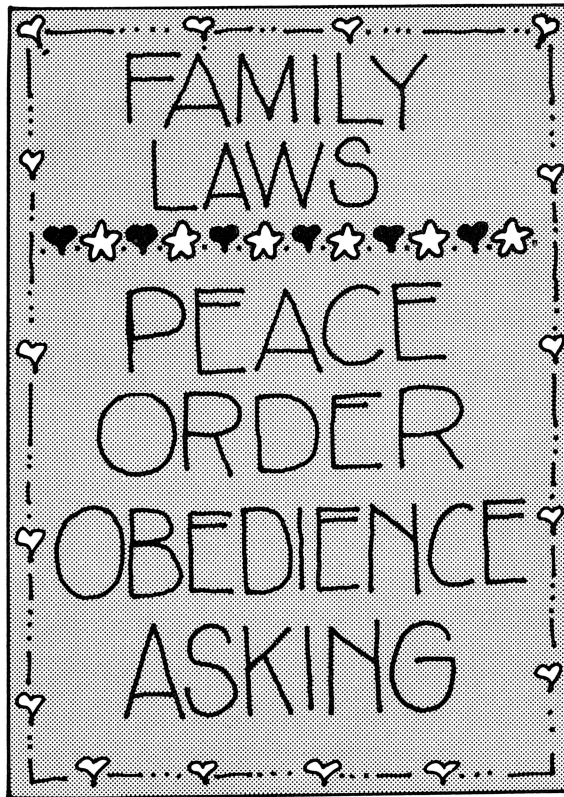
(Mother and Father promised that they would try

not to make too many requests. . .

or any too unreasonable

. . . and to say “please”!)

“ASKING!” covered not going anywhere, inviting anyone over, etc. without permission.



Punishments were also simplified

(and made more like natural consequences).

Those who broke the law of PEACE! had to sit on the hard, straight-backed parsons bench in the hall

until they could tell

what *they* (not the other guy) had done wrong.



Those who violated ORDER! simply had to stay in their room until it was clean.

Those who transgressed OBEDIENCE! were reminded of the law

and asked again.

If obedience was still not forthcoming

it was off to their room until they were ready to do it.

Those who didn't ASK!

knew that the answer would be "no"

the next time they wanted to do something

or go somewhere.

The process of revising and simplifying the laws was somewhat democratic.

Children agreed on the punishments in advance.

(Children, Mother and Father found, will usually suggest a more severe punishment than you had in mind. . . .

when thinking about it before the fact.)

One "reserve" form of punishment was saved for flagrant violators of any family law.

It was the infamous method known as the "spank."

(It was Father's deep and sincere belief that the Almighty had given children

a particularly fleshy part of their bodies

containing abundant nerve endings

specifically for use in reversing

particularly objectionable behavior.)

Well . . .

The new, simplified system worked . . . sort of.

The problem was that there were still so

many things that the children were supposed to be doing that weren't among the laws,

like brushing their teeth,

practicing,

saying their prayers, making their beds,  
doing their family jobs,  
getting to bed on time.

“Will we have to expand the family laws?” Mother asked.  
“I’m still spending all my time reminding them to do  
all these things,  
or doing them myself!”

(It had always been, to Mother, a significant dilemma  
whether to keep after children to do things  
or to do them herself.  
The energy required for one  
seemed almost precisely equal  
to the energy required for the other.)

“Not on you life” said Father.

“We’re going to keep these laws simple!  
They’re just starting to work!”

“Well then we’ve got to do what the mineshaft said,”  
said Mother.

“We’ve got to find a simplifier for all of these other things.”

So they did!

Father made up a pegboard for each child.

Each one was a board with four, big, blocky pegs  
hanging by little chains

ready to be pushed into four holes on the board.

Each board had the child’s name carved on it.

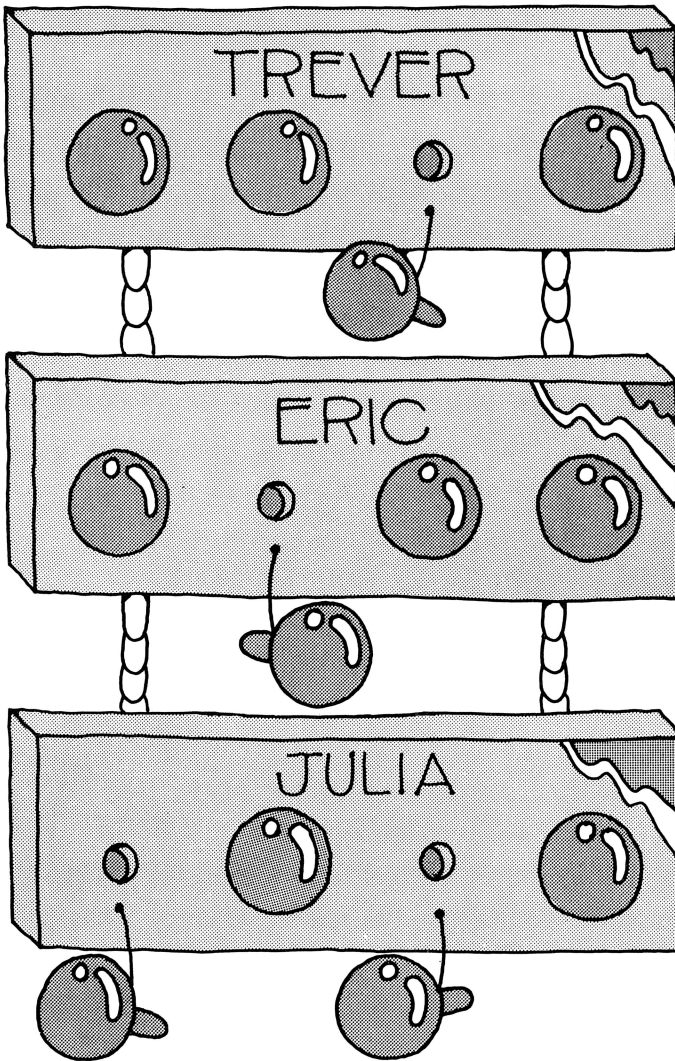
When the kids first saw it they were excited  
because they thought it was some sort of  
three-dimensional tic-tac-toe game.

They were much less excited when Mom explained it.

“This first peg,” she said, “Goes in when you’ve done  
your ‘morning things’—

(bed made, teeth brushed, prayer said,  
dressed and to breakfast on time).

The second peg goes in when your practicing is done. The third peg is for your daily family job and number four is the evening peg, (teeth, prayer, room straight, in bed on time).” The kids were even less excited when Dad said “We’ll keep track of how many pegs you get in during the week and that will determine how much allowance you get.” Mother added “We’ve now got a fifth one-word family law — PEGS!”



There was some predictable moaning and groaning  
but it was kind of fun  
to push those big pegs into their holes,  
and Mother was substituting one word now for fifty!  
She used to say,  
“Get your bed made, get your teeth brushed, do your job,  
do that practicing, get in bed, did you have your prayer,  
etc.”

And she used to say them all about fifty times  
every day.

(It is an interesting audio fact that when you hear something  
fifty times a day,  
you hardly hear it at all!)

Now one word said it all . . .

She just said

“PEGS!”

She still had to say it a *lot*,  
but she sure saved a lot of breath!

One of the very *niciest* parts of the peg system  
(for Mother and Father) was the bedtime part.  
The evening peg made the children  
very *aware* of a precise bedtime  
(somewhat earlier than they had been going to bed before).  
Father made it very clear that, at the stroke of bedtime,  
they had two options.

One was to go directly to sleep.

The other was to *read* in bed for a half hour  
and then turn out the light.

The number of books read in the family went up by 800%!

And . . . the system worked . . . most of the time.

The pegs kept everyone more aware  
of what was expected of them.

The problem was the little kids.

Their attention span wasn't long enough  
to remember those pegs.

Their three- and five-year-old minds didn't grasp it all and their little room was only slightly less messy than in pre-min shaft days.

Mother wrote the next note.

It said, in a wonderfully articulate, down-to-earth, mother-language, run-on sentence:

"The systems we're working out for the older kids don't work for the younger ones who are still messy and we can't seem to get something that works for all of us!"

Father took it up and threw it in the min shaft.



Three days later Mother noticed that the kite that had been stuck in the tree all summer had blown down.

It was dangling by its string, just hanging there right outside the front door and it had writing on it.

It said:

*“The more complex the organization, the greater the need for middle management.”*

And it had a P.S.

(apparently the mineshaft

did not restrict its answers to one sentence).

*“P.S. Forgive my wording, but one way to avoid a mess is to remove the elements that can be messed.”*

And there was still another note,

scribbled in pencil at the very bottom of the page.

*“P.P.S. . . . think of a way to make neatness fun.”*

Father and Mother thought the meaning of the first P.S.

was the clearest part of the message, so

they decided to work on it first.

The things the small children messed their room up with

fell into two categories:

*toys and clothes.*

Mother and Father decided to remove both.

They took the two little dressers to the laundry room

which they re-named “the nerve center” and into which

they also put three basket-bins:

one white, one black, one grey.

They explained to the little children that the nerve center was like a *library*.

They could “check out” one set of clothes at a time — only one.

Dirty clothes went in the bins. White in one, dark in another, colored in the third.

Father made it *very* clear.

“Your clothes,” he said, “Can only be in one of three places, on you,

in your dresser,

or in one of these big bins.”



The little children nodded agreeably. They liked anything that was *new*.

“Same thing with the toys,”  
said Mother (the kids liked this a little less).

“They’re *all* going to go on the shelves in the playroom  
and you can take one at a time to play with.

When you put it back you can take another one.”

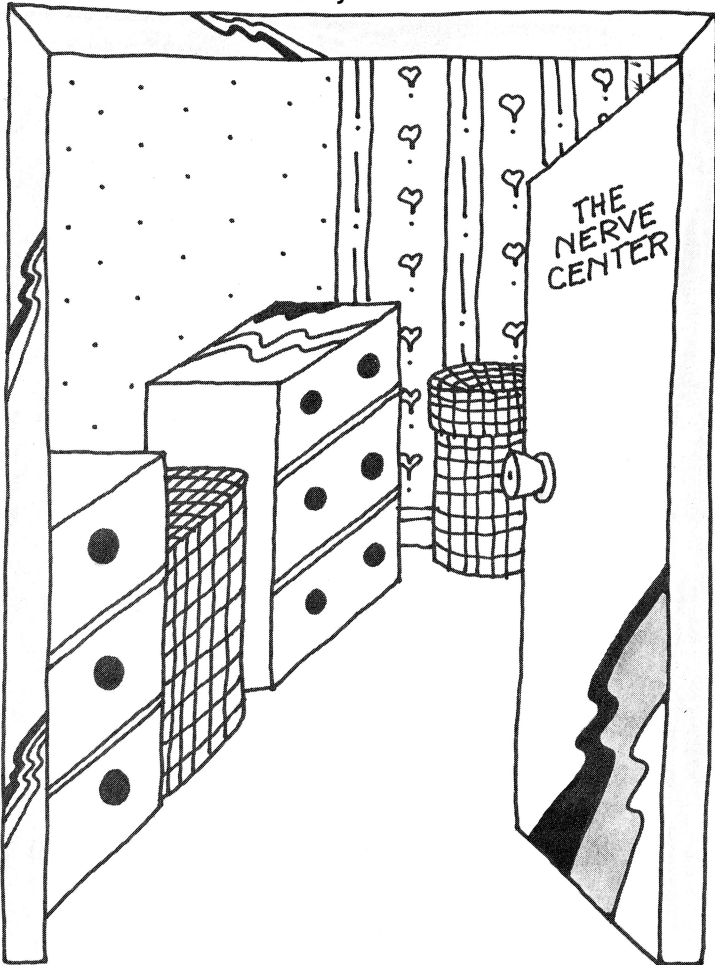
“Will we ever be able to have our things back in our room?”  
said the five-year-old.

“You will,” Mother assured him, “When you are older.

First prove you can keep them tidy  
in the playroom and the nerve center.

Then, when we think you are ready,

We will move them back into your room.”



Well . . . it kind-of worked. In fact it *more* than kind-of worked.

The little kids *couldn't* mess up their room since all that was there was their beds.

(Mother did let each of them have a little box *under* their bed for their “most special” things.)

They weren't strong enough to tip their beds over, so they couldn't mess up their rooms.

Mother even put big comforters on their beds so the beds didn't have all those covers and sheets and were easier to “make.”

The playroom and nerve center were sort-of like libraries. The problem was that there was no permanent *librarian*, so things didn't always get returned.

The system wasn't perfect but it *was* helpful!

What messes there were were mostly *confined* to the nerve center and the playroom.

In their effort to “make neatness fun”

Mother came up with one other idea.

She found a big, old laundry bag and sewed a *face* on it . . . big eyes and nose, and the drawstring opening had “teeth” sewn around it and became a mouth.

She introduced the creature to the kids as “Gunny Bag” and explained that he lived in the attic.

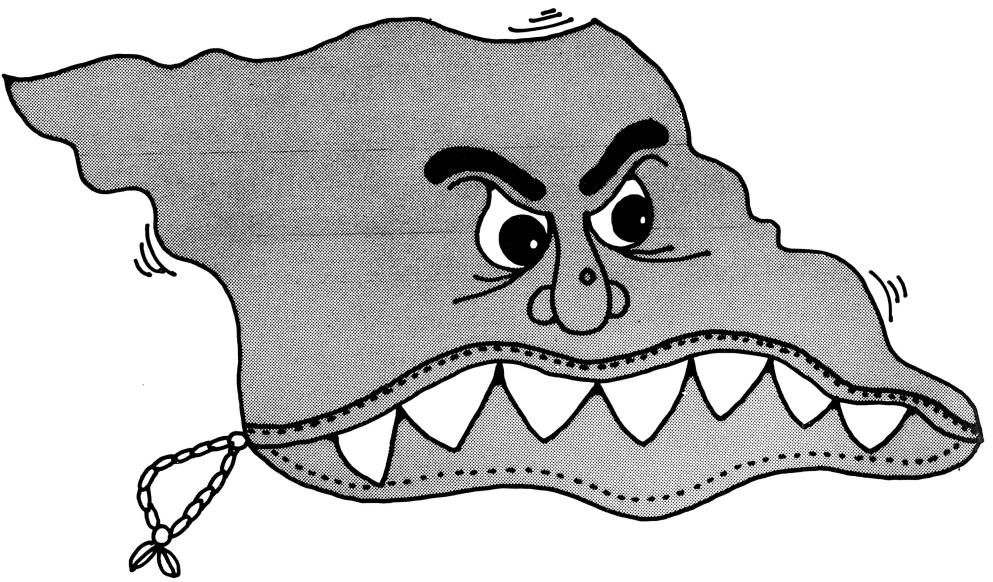
His diet *was clothes, and toys.*

But he could eat only things that were left out of place.

He descended from the attic unexpectedly . . .

any hour of any day or night and ate whatever he could find.

Usually on Saturday afternoon Gunny Bag came and “coughed up” whatever he had eaten during the week.



If things were put quickly away, they could be saved.  
If things were eaten for a second time, they were “gone forever.”

Mother found that when the kids didn't respond to her shout of “PEGS!”  
they *would* respond to “I think I hear Gunny Bag coming.”

With the “order” in the home  
at a somewhat more acceptable level,  
Father and Mother now shifted their attention to  
the main part of the mineshaft message, which said,  
*“The more complex the organization,  
the greater the need for middle management.”*  
Mother and Father thought and thought . . . and thought!  
Middle management . . . how about the two older  
children?

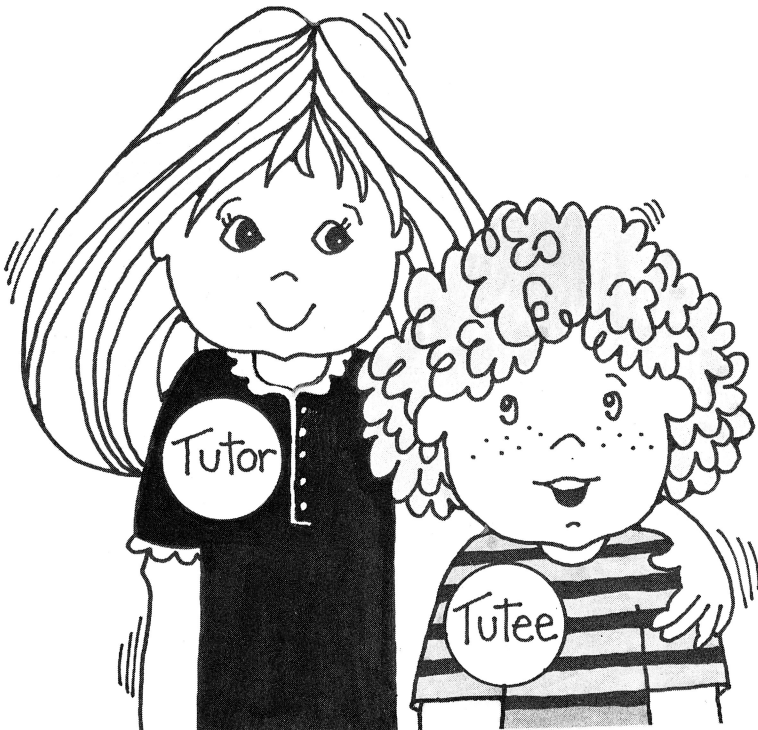
They need to become more responsible for their  
younger siblings anyway.

The thing that triggered the idea was that the sixth grader  
was very excited lately about a new program at school  
where a sixth grader got to spend an hour each day  
*tutoring*

a third grader on his math and English.

The school's theory was that younger kids learn a lot

from older ones,  
and older ones learn a lot by teaching.  
And a good theory it was.  
Mother and Father decided to implement it in their family.  
They took the two older children to dinner at  
a nice restaurant  
(that was a “first”).  
They explained to them that they were proud of how  
*mature* they were becoming and especially of how well  
they were doing with the laws and the pegs.  
They then shared their concern about the smaller kids.  
“We’ve decided we need your help,” said Mother,  
“So each month you each get to be a *tutor*  
to one of the little ones.  
You will help them get their pegs in  
and keep the laws.  
You will even help them cut their meat at the dinner table  
and be quiet in church.



We won't give them an allowance any more,  
but we will *raise* yours  
so that *you* can pay *them* something  
when they do well."

(Any doubts either of the older kids had were erased by  
the money angle . . .

and the fact that Mother and Father thought of them as  
grown-up enough to have *such* responsibility.)

On the way home from the restaurant, one of the kids  
coined a phrase that *labeled* the whole idea.

"I guess if we are the tutors," he said,  
"they are the 'tutees'."

Well . . . it worked better than anything had worked  
before.

Mother and Father were amazed at how much the tutors  
could teach (and how well) . . .

and at how well the tutees responded and followed  
examples.

They switched tutees each month so no one got bored.

Home was still not a total bed of roses  
but . . .

Father found that things were going smoothly enough  
that his "home time" was less devoted to  
stopping fights and disciplining  
and more to good, fun, learning time with the kids.

And Mother, while still over-protective  
and still killing herself

trying to do everything right,

at least had a simplified way to remind children ("PEGS!")  
and had more help than before (from the tutors).

The trouble was, things went *gradually* downhill.

After a little of the newness and excitement of the laws,  
the pegs,  
the nerve center,

and the tutors and tutees  
wore off,  
it started getting hard to motivate the children again.  
So . . . Father went back to the mineshaft.  
The question he flung into the draft said  
(in his most businesslike terminology)  
“How do we maintain the motivation?”

Three days later,  
as he came out of the barbershop at the mall,  
he noticed that all the cars in the parking lot had a flyer  
on their windshield.  
All of the flyers announced the opening  
of a new shoe store  
except the one on his own windshield.  
It said,  
*Rewards and penalties  
along with frequent public evaluation  
are the most time-tested motivation methods in the  
universe.”*





“Gee,” thought Father,  
“I wish the shaft would just give me  
specific answers instead of these principles.”  
But he went right home and started to *think* about it  
with Mother.

That very Sunday, they started something new.  
At Sunday dinner, Father said he had three awards  
to give for outstanding behavior.  
One was the “self-starter” award  
which would go to the child who had done the best job  
of getting all his pegs in without being asked.

One was the “leader-for-the-right” award,  
which would go to the child who had ended a fight,  
set a good example, broken the fewest laws,  
or refused to go along  
with a friend or a brother or sister  
who was doing something wrong.

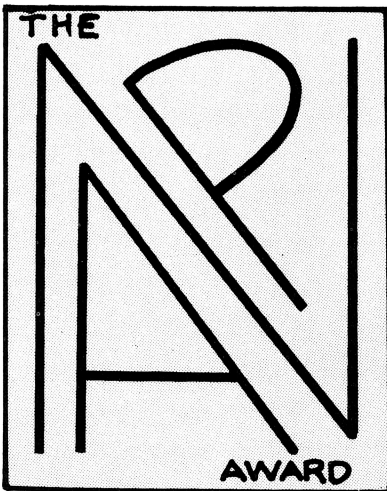
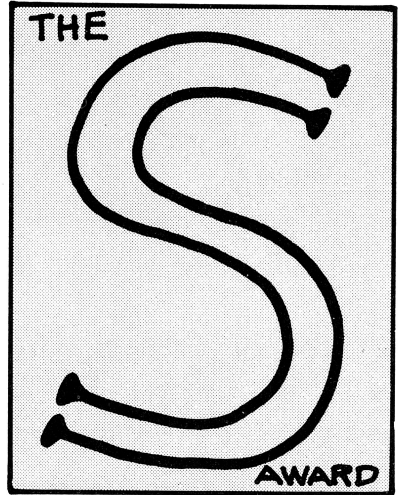
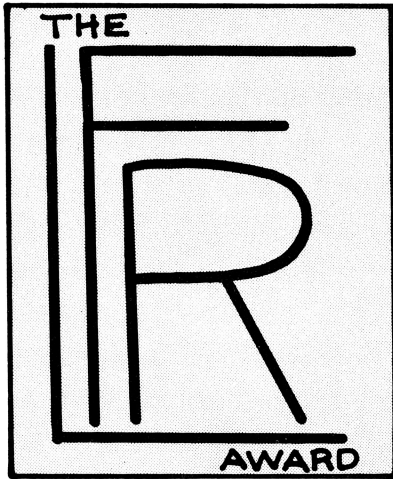
The third award was the “neat-as-a-pin” award  
which would go to the child who had kept  
his things and his room in the best order.  
The rewards, he explained, would go on the winners’  
bedroom doors for the week ahead.

“Now,” he said, “Who thinks they are in the running  
for one of these awards?”

An interesting discussion followed,  
with each child trying to think back  
and discover positive behavior.

When it was done and the awards were given,  
Mother had her turn. She held up a simple chart.

“When you behave badly,” she said,  
“And kind-of partially break a law — but not bad enough  
for the punishment,



(like speaking meanly or not obeying on the first request) you're going to get a black mark on this chart. I'll just smudge one on there with a big black crayon and we'll talk about the chart every Sunday after we finish the awards."

Well . . . things got a little better. It suprised Mother and Father how much the children wanted those awards. It also suprised them how much they *learned* about their children's activities

as they were told what each child thought he had done to deserve each award.

Frankly, the black marks bothered some children more than others, but they were still helpful.

So time passed, and the family seemed to do better and better.

Mother was still running herself ragged trying to keep everyone happy and in-line.

Father was still too busy, but,

looking back, both could see how far they had come, and both were grateful for the mineshaft principles.

One concern that lingered was what the kids would do when left on their own, without the proddings of Mother and Father (mostly Mother).

Everyone found out during the week that Mother and Father

went to the spelunker convention in Colorado springs. (Their interest in the mineshaft had opened to them the whole world of cave exploration— it was their new hobby.)

Anyway . . .

while they were gone, a babysitter was there.

Nothing much happened.

Nothing much at all.

Well, that's not quite fair to say,

the kids did pretty well at keeping the family laws,

but not many pegs were put in,

and the tutors forgot about their tutees.

When they came back, Father and Mother were concerned.

"You know," Father said to Mother,

“It’s part of a broader problem.  
Maybe we’re just teaching our kids  
to *react*  
to a system.

I want kids who act rather than react,  
who decide what they want from life  
and go out and get it.

(He’d heard those words at a positive thinking rally . . .  
but they were true anyway.)

So it was back to the old mineshaft.

(Father and Mother had speculated  
as to how many questions  
one person could ask at the shaft,  
but they had never heard of any limitation.)

Father used his positive thinking rally words to  
phrase his question.

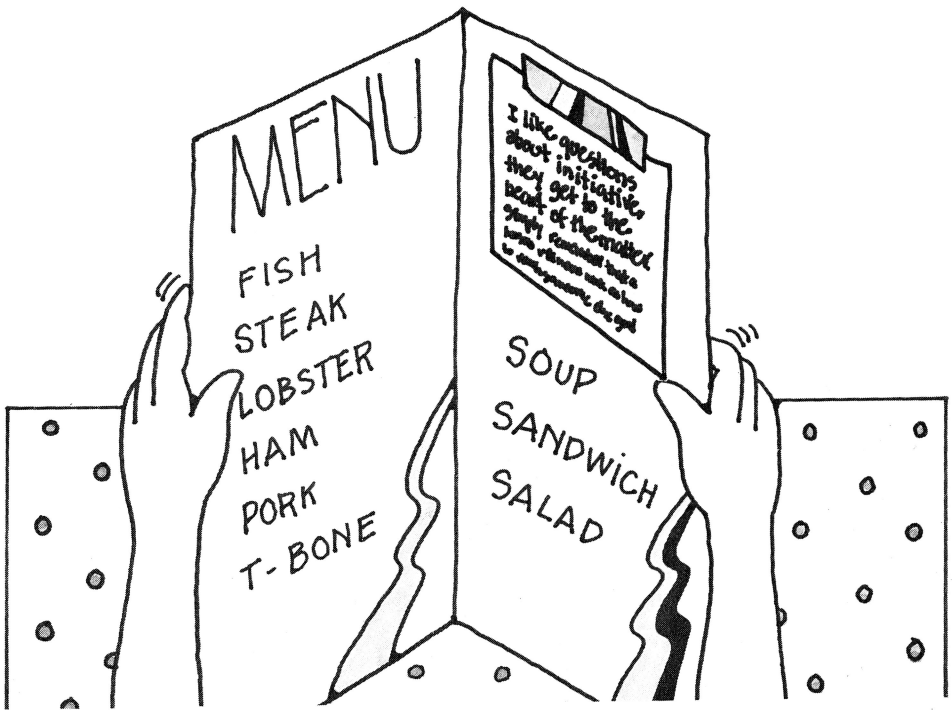
“How do we get our children to take the initiative to  
act for themselves,  
to realize that they are the masters of their fate?”

Father had to leave town early the next day  
so Mother took it up to the shaft  
in between batches of bread.

The in-draft was particularly strong that day and  
Mother lost her apron, which was not tied on very securely.

Father, who was still in New York on business  
three days later,  
opened his menu at the Four Seasons Restaurant  
and found, where the wine list should have been,  
the following statement:

*“I like questions about initiative, they get to the  
heart of the matter. Simply remember that a person will  
never work as hard to reach someone else’s goals as he  
will to reach his own.”*



This principle really excited father. On the plane the next day, he designed a simple, weekly planning and goal setting form. It had two boxes where children could write down (or *draw* if they were too small to write) two simple goals for the week ahead. Each box had a circle by it that children could color in when they completed the goal. Below was a space for each day of the week so that children could draw an arrow from the goal to the day they planned on working on it.

Father xeroxed the form at his office, and it became more or less a family tradition for everyone, including Father and Mother, to fill one in each Sunday. One of the kids started referring to them as "Sunday Sessions."

One unexpected benefit arose from the Sunday Sessions.

Father, you see, for years,  
had been trying to have a little "interview"  
with each child each Sunday.

(Truthfully, it started as his way of trying  
to get rid of the guilt he felt  
for not being around much of the week.)

But the interviews had always been a flop.

For one thing, Father did all the talking.

He would say, "How is school going?"  
and the "interviewee" would squirm a little and say  
"fine."

Father would ask question after question and get a  
"fine" or an "o.k." sometimes with an "I guess"  
on the end.

The Sunday Sessions changed all that.

Kids would come in for their interview and

Father would say nothing.

Sunday Session						
○	□	○	□	○	□	○
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S



The child would just tell Father about the goals on his Sunday Session.

In the *process* (since the child had the initiative) lots would get said.

“My goal is to make a new friend, Father.”

Father would resist the impulse to say something like “Why, don’t the kids like you?”

and would simply nod or say “I see.”

The child would then go on

“Yes . . . because last week Betty hit me you see, and I need another friend . . .”

and so on.

Father started learning a lot in interviews, and the children started realizing that they could *decide*

what they wanted each week to be like.

Mother and Father encouraged the children to have goals that were *related* to the pegs, the awards, etc.

A good goal was something like

“win the ‘neat as a pin’ award this week”

or

“Get all my pegs in on at least four days”

The main problem now, it seemed, was consistency.

The household had more order and peace in it than ever before,

but it was hard for Mother and Father (mainly Mother)

to keep track of pegs

so she knew how much allowance to give

and to keep track of the children’s money and

attempt to encourage them to save some money

and to see that everyone reached the goals

on their “Sunday Session.”

Mainly, it was hard to remember to be sure that each tutor and each tutee had his pegs in every night.

(Also, incidentally, in spite of *everything*, the older kids still left clothes out too often, and even more irritatingly, often *lost* coats, hats and other items that cost Father and Mother money.) “I think we’ve become ‘over-systemed’,” Mother said to Father, “we’ve got too many little separate systems going here.”

At the risk of getting an answer that would lead to still another system, Father went back to the mineshaft.

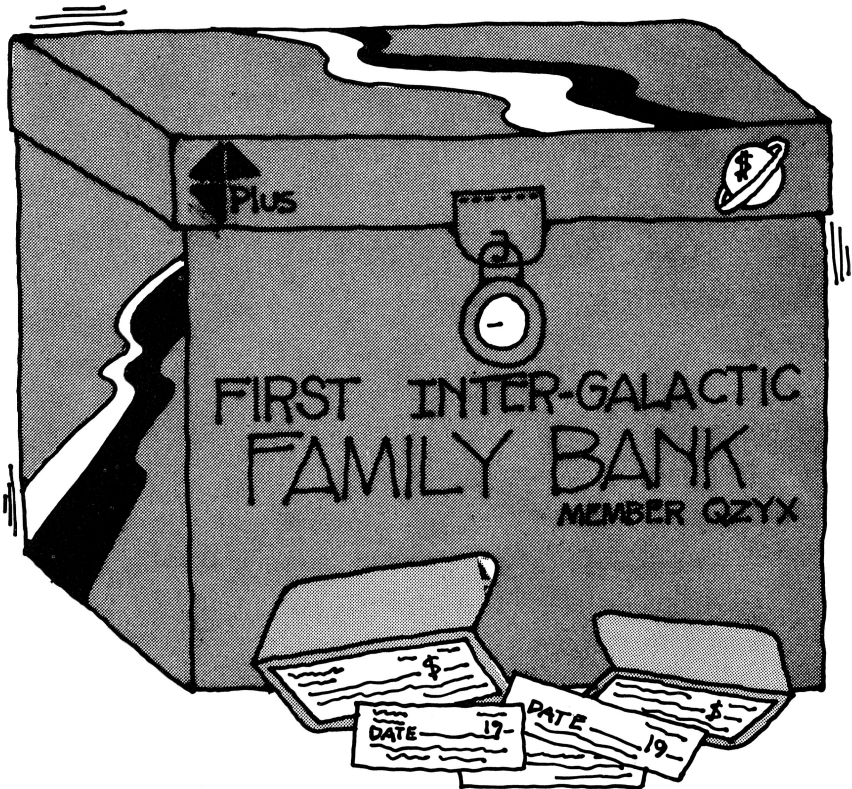
Mother had written up another run-on sentence question. “How do we remember and keep track of all these systems, and remind everybody to do everything, and make the older kids more responsible for their money and their clothes?”

Father took it up and threw it to the mineshaft during his lunch hour.

Three days later, Mother was driving back from the cleaners with the baby and the two little kids in the back seat. The radio station interrupted its music and said, “We interrupt this program to bring you a special message.” Then a very different voice came on and said, “*One learns responsibility only through agency. One has responsibility only when he takes initiative. Lots of small systems, with a little tinkering, might be made into one simple system.*”

Mother veered to the side of the road,  
causing the two little kids in the back seat to bump heads.  
Mother grabbed for a pencil in her purse.  
She had already forgotten the first sentence.  
The radio said, "We repeat . . ."  
This time she got it down.  
"Did you hear that kids?" she asked,  
but they were still crying and holding their heads.

Mother and Father thought about the message for  
a couple of weeks.  
Then they acted!  
Father, in his first attempt at carpentry since making the  
peg boards, made a big square box with a hinged lid and a  
slot in the top.



He spray-painted it gold  
and stencil-lettered the words “Family Bank”  
across the front.

Then he got a huge combination lock and locked it up.

Mother, in the meantime,  
dug out a bunch of old checkbooks  
from an old closed account  
and bought a stack of small paper slips  
at the stationery store.

That Sunday at dinner,  
before the awards and black marks,  
Father made a rather formal speech  
(and Mother explained what he meant as he went along).

“This is the family bank,” said Father,  
“We have decided that you two older children  
are mature enough

to have checking accounts.

Here are your check books.

I will show you how to write out a check  
and a deposit slip.”

By this point the small children had totally lost interest.  
Mother wisely excused them  
and said *of course* they could go to the back yard to play.

Father forged on, Mother clarifying,  
and told the children that they were too grown-up  
for allowances,  
that they would now be *paid* for the work they were doing  
as the family’s middle management.

(Mother explained that Father meant *tutors* when he said  
“middle management”.)

“Each Saturday will be payday,” said Father, “and  
the amount you will be paid will depend on  
your *pegs* and your *goals* (and those of your tutees).  
For each of your four pegs and each of your tutee’s  
four pegs you will get ten points,

except for *your* practicing peg, which takes the longest, and will therefore be worth 30.

So you will have a possibility of 100 points each day (7 ten point pegs plus one 30 point peg).

*If you want* (it's up to you) you can fill out one of these little slips each night by putting down your points for the day. Get Mother or Father to initial it, and slip it into the family bank through the slot on top."

"Then, on payday, we'll take out all your slips, add them up and give you a penny a point."

"But that's only a possibility of \$5.00 a week!"

said one of the quicker, older children (because they didn't do pegs on weekends).

"Ahh," said Mother, "But there's one part we haven't told you. If you get 500 points then your total will be doubled on payday."

The other older child brightened, then frowned.

"But that would be almost impossible . . . to get *every peg every day*."

"I know," said Mother, "But there's another part Father didn't tell you.

You also get 50 points if you reach your weekly goals and your Sunday session,

and another 25 points if your tutee reaches his goals, and,

you get another 25 if you win one of the Sunday awards.

So you have a possibility of 600 points or \$12 every week."

"Of course you'll want to pay a couple of dollars to your tutee," said Dad.

"Because without his cooperation (and his pegs), you could never get your points doubled."

"One more thing," said Mom. "If anyone has a black mark during the day, you have to take 10 points off before we will initial your slip."

Father then reiterated that no one *had* to fill out a slip and furthermore, he and Mother weren't going to do much reminding. The only penalty for missing pegs or slips would show up on payday in the form of a smaller pay-check.

"Now, since you'll have more money," said Mother, "you can start buying all of your own clothes. This way they will really be *yours* and we think you'll take better care of them." "But don't spend all your money," chimed in Father, "because what you leave in the bank will earn 25% interest, compounded quarterly." (The low point of the whole discussion was Father's attempted explanation of what "25% compounded quarterly" meant.)

Well . . . now things *really* began to work. The initiative was with the children. They got their pegs in because they had goals to do so and knew what it would mean on payday. They monitored their own performance by filling out nightly slips. They had added motivation to win the Sunday awards and help their tutees (or cooperate with their tutors) and avoid black marks.

The family had never worked better. Some days, to the *shock* of both Father and Mother, were almost *smooth*.

As weeks passed, they worked to “fine-tune” the system. They thought a lot about the system and were quite proud of themselves for coming up with it. One day one of the children was trying to tell Mother something.

Mother said, “First you get your pegs in, then I’ll listen.” “You care more about this system than you do about me!” said the child.

Mother and Father tried not to pay too much attention to that comment.

But something happened a couple of days later that they had to pay attention to.

They were jogging together on a Saturday morning (the tutors were helping the tutees do their jobs at home). Suddenly both Father and Mother got rocks in their shoes and had to stop, but they weren’t rocks. They were messages . . . wadded up *mineshaft* messages, and this time they hadn’t even asked!





Mother got hers unraveled first. It said:

*“Everyone who goes to the mineshaft six times gets a seventh bit of advice free . . . on the house. Here’s yours: (you need it . . . look in other shoe and pay attention).”*

Father’s note went on:

*“Remember that you built the system to build the children . . . don’t put the plan ahead of the goal, use the time the system saves you to think about them individually and to be with them individually.”*

It was the most direct message the mineshaft had ever given, and both Father and Mother, in spite of themselves, knew exactly what it meant.

They had become a little “system oriented.”

Other than the “Sunday session interviews,” they weren’t dealing with the children as individuals.

Not that they wanted to change anything . . . things were *working* better than ever before.

Since they didn’t want to change any *thing*, they decided to change *themselves* a bit.

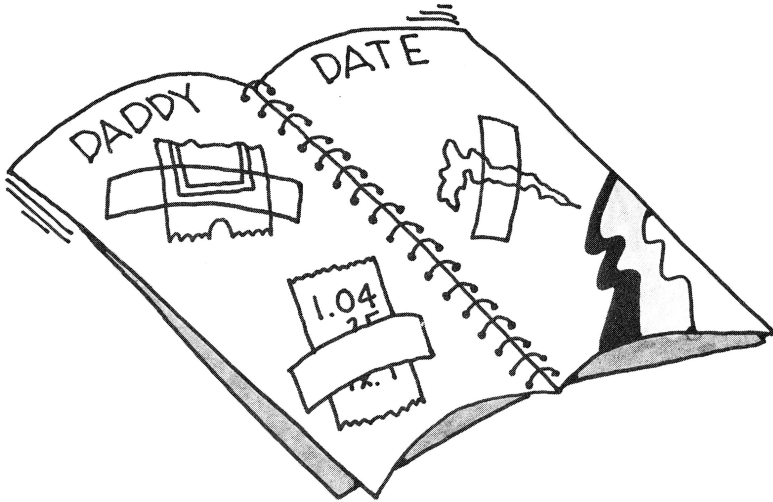
Here’s what they did.

Father decided he could find time each Saturday morning to take two children, one at a time, on a 15 or 20 minute “daddy date”.

It didn’t much matter where they went.

One week it might be to the shirt laundry, another week when there was more time to the swimming pool or even the circus.

One-on-one *talking* just happens when you're one-on-one.  
Father found out things,  
had chances to teach and encourage.



Remembering the daddy dates  
was as fun as having them so . . .

Father got each child a small notebook and wrote on it  
“Daddy Date Book”.

On each date, they found some small memento  
(a piece of the sales slip from the cleaners,  
some lint from a swimming towel, a ticket stub . . .)

These odd little objects were each taped to a page on the  
child’s book.

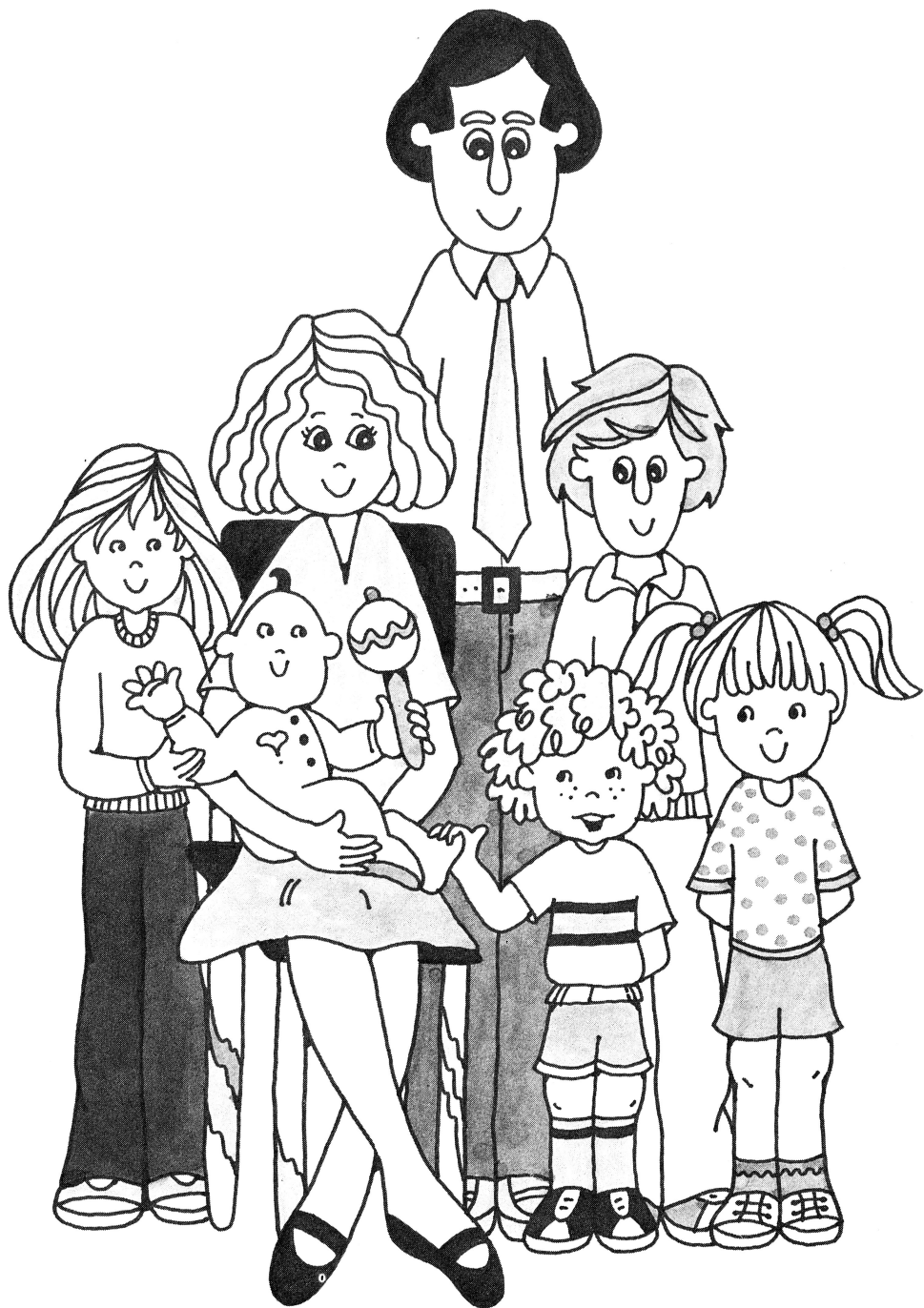
And months, even years later, each page brought back  
an in-tact memory.

Using the principles of fairness and equality as her case,  
Mother persuaded Father to get home a bit early  
one afternoon each week  
to allow a mommy date to transpire.

Mother and Father did one other thing to respond to the mineshaft admonition. They went out to their favorite restaurant once a month (what a sacrifice!) and held what they called a “five facet review.” They started with the oldest child and asked each other “How is she doing physically? How is she doing mentally? How is she doing socially? How is she doing emotionally? How is she doing spiritually?” They discussed each facet, finding out what each other knew. Then they went on to the next child.

It was *interesting*.

Can you believe it, they even found themselves taking *notes*. They found that solutions weren’t that difficult once the problem or concern had been clearly defined. They found that they were far more aware of children’s gifts and potential after having thought carefully about each one each month. They found that the ideas they got in “five facet review” were better than the ideas they got from parenting books (at least they were better for *them*, for their particular needs). With the addition of daddy and mommy dates and the five facet review, the system seemed complete.



So what happened to Father and Mother and The Family That Worked?

Well . . .

we would like to tell you that Father never had another family worry

as long as he lived, and

we would like to tell you that all Mother had to do now was sit back, relax, and watch the system work . . .

But if we'd told you that,

you'd disbelieve everything else we've said, too

(or else put yourself in the running

for the *most naive person in the world award*).

so we'll tell you the truth:

Parenting was still hard.

Some of the children responded better to the system than others,

but a certain amount of initiative had been shifted.

The atmosphere of the home was more pleasant,

the work of the home was more shared,

family members took better care of each other, and of their own things,

and, most amazing of all,

Father and Mother had more *time* to enjoy the children and to enjoy each other.

The family worked!

## POSTSCRIPT

One day, after using “the system” for a year or so, Mother found herself teaching a seminar on parenting (of all things). She had begun by asking the parents in attendance what they wanted most from their children, next to love. “Responsibility” was the winning answer. Mother next asked the group just what it was that they wanted their children to be responsible *for*. The group responded, and Mother listed on the blackboard:

Things  
Work  
Actions  
Choices  
A peaceful attitude  
Gifts and talents  
Potential  
Obedience  
Character  
Dependability  
Smaller children  
Contribution

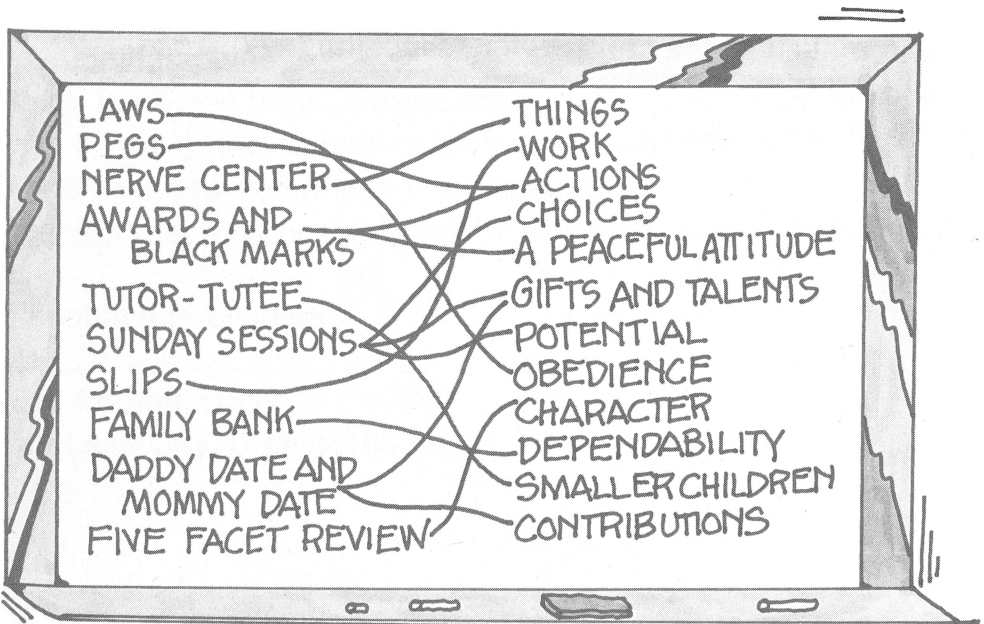
Then, Mother had gone through and explained the whole *system*, showing how it taught *all* of the forms of responsibility that had been listed. She had written the following words on the blackboard during her explanation:

1. Laws
2. Pegs
3. Nerve-center (and Gunny Bag)
4. Awards/black marks
5. Tutors-tutees
6. Sunday Sessions/interviews
7. Slips
8. Family Bank/checkbooks
9. Daddy dates/mommy dates
10. Five facet reviews.

Mother realized what a funny looking list it was, at least without explanation.

So she drew some connecting lines to show how each part of the system

helps teach one or more of the kinds of responsibility that the class had listed.



When the class was over, Mother felt that most had understood.

But one lady came up who obviously hadn't.

"Look at this complicated thing you've drawn on the blackboard,"

she complained.

"My life is too complex already . . .

I don't have time to do *anything*,

let alone something like this."

Mother sat down with her

and made again the central point that the lady had missed.

"The point of this system is to *simplify* your life,

to get the initiative and responsibility off your back

by shifting it to the children.

The reward of the system is *time*,

*more time.*"

Then Mother did something a little uncharacteristic.

(She has had more of a sense of humor since the system started working.)

She winked at the still perplexed-looking lady

and said,

"Try it, you'll like it!"



## A Note From The Dolittles

We've enjoyed writing this little fable.

It would be only fair to point out that some of the ideas

of the fable came from our friends

Linda and Richard Eyre.

They are the founders of a program (as you may know) called TCR (Teaching Children Responsibility) that supplies families with a monthly manual, newsletter and tape, designed to help them teach one *form* of responsibility each month.

Their program *elaborates* on most parts of the system described in this fable.

The Eyres have also founded a program called TCJ (or Joy Schools)

for mothers who want to have neighborhood preschool groups and teach their own kids.

The curriculum for TCJ concentrates on social and emotional happiness, which the Eyres think is more important to preschoolers than learning how to read or compute square roots.

If you have any comments or questions, you can reach us or the Eyres by writing to our publisher:

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