

know intimately, almost all of the best-adjusted, most-fulfilling marriages started young.

Why? One reason stands out above all others: the need for mental flexibility in both partners. Just when and where this begins to settle into a hard set of prejudices is, of course, an individual matter. With a few people, it never happens. But there's a wonderful period—perhaps between 18 and 25—when a person hasn't hardened his opinions, when he's not only open-minded but also curious and questing, when he's searching for standards and qualities and principles in which he can believe. That's the time to get married.

THE SEARCH for these principles is a rewarding business. It never really ends—or at least it never should—but when a man and wife undertake the quest together, they establish a rapport that can be found in no other way. They don't have to agree with each other right down the line, by any means; that has relatively little bearing on the matter. But the satisfaction of the search, pursued together, the joy of growth and discovery, and the tolerance for another's views are really important.

Too often the individual who has made this search alone, established what he considers an ideal set of standards, and closed his mental doors to further investigation can be an irritating and frustrating partner.

It doesn't have to be in big things, either. I know one 30-year-old ex-bachelor, recently married, who cooked most of his own meals for some years and developed a number of hard-headed kitchen habits which he carried into marriage. Now he's almost driving his wife crazy by criticizing the way she runs her kitchen. She's new at it and is feeling her way; and he's making it ten times as difficult by assuming that his methods are the right ones and criticizing her whenever she departs from them.

A few weeks ago, we went on a picnic with this couple and they were hardly civil to each other. While the husband was away on an errand, his wife told us:

"He asked me to make the potato salad before we went to church this morning so it would be all ready when we got home. I didn't want to make it then; I wanted to make it just before we left for the picnic so it would be fresh. So what did he do? He dropped me off at church and went home and made it himself. He had no right to do that. I wanted to make it, and I wanted to do it my way."

This may sound childish, yet it's the sort of thing that often goes on with supposedly mature people who wait too long to get married. Most of their difficulties are over petty matters that are magnified out of all proportion to their importance—matters which younger people can take in stride.

The adjustments to marriage are considerable and profound. The more established the previous lives of the partners, the more difficult the adjust-

ments. Young people coming right out of college have had no opportunity to get "set in their ways." But the longer they live alone after this point, the more rooted their habits become—the harder it is to change.

And change they must. A marriage that's worth its salt is a union of two people, not a treaty between two unilateral powers. Young people are ready for this union. Their love is passionate, their enthusiasm boundless, their curiosity profound, their adaptability unlimited, their wisdom perfunctory, and their capacity for joy or disappointment, appreciation or vexation, enjoyment or boredom almost without bounds.

These young people don't lose individuality in marriage; they enlarge and sharpen it in the give-and-take which goes along with a thoroughly satisfactory union. This is a point that many older marriages miss: the thirties newlyweds are so jealous of their own individualities that they are reluctant to take the chance of gambling any part away by giving too generously of themselves. What they don't realize is that by giving, by being pliable and understanding, each individuality becomes broader, more fulfilling, and much more satisfying.

The argument that young people don't know what they want, that they should be old enough to exercise

quaintances who were married young in the midst of the stress and desperate urgency of wartime. I don't know of a single one of those marriages that has ended in divorce.

Although this isn't the national pattern, still, most wartime marriages had everything going against them. The relatively high percentage of successful marriages growing out of the war certainly indicates the extreme adaptability of the young people who contracted them.

Not only were the war years uncertain and trying, but the postwar period of adjustment to an altogether different kind of life taxed understanding to the utmost. More than anything else, youthful thinking and optimism and flexibility brought hundreds of thousands of marriages through this period. And these same attributes of youth can work for successful marriages in peace or war.

PHYSICAL ATTRACTION, we are told, also motivates young people unduly in hastening them into precipitate marriages. Perhaps, But is this necessarily bad? Physical attraction motivates every marriage. When it first begins to give ground to other attractions is when the mettle of the marriage is tested.

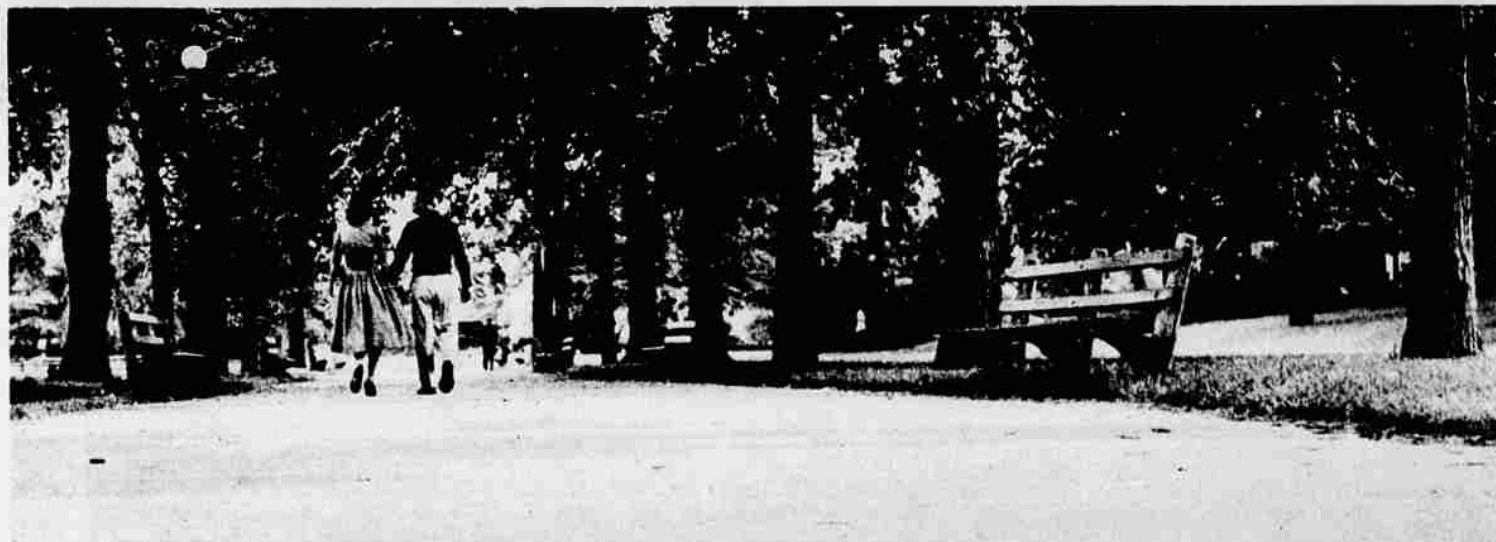
Here again, the ability of young people to put as much enthusiasm into

I don't know whether I'm going to be able to break through that or not. I think she honestly tries, but she just can't seem to let go of the idea that she's still running a classroom and I'm an overage student who flunked out back along the line."

The other husband said: "We worked out this business of her career before we got married. So that's okay. I don't expect her to be waiting for me at the door in a frilly apron with hot biscuits ready in the oven. But I also don't expect her to act as if I'm one of the clerks in her department when problems come up around the house. I'm perfectly willing to let her judgment prevail on most of these things because I think her judgment is sound—but it isn't infallible. And home isn't the office—hers or mine."

I know there are many young married people who get into tangles that make these problems seem like smooth sailing. Their economics can get fouled up to the point of imminent starvation; their love life often has to surmount acres of ignorance and uncertainty; their stumbling with first children can set grandparents' teeth on edge; their houses may crumble from lack of proper maintenance, or their meals suffer from complete absence of coherent planning. But somehow they survive these things.

Kids have a tremendous resiliency



mature judgment in selecting a partner is one of those half-truths that badly needs to be qualified. This all hinges on a definition of maturity. I've seen ten-year-old boys who were decidedly more mature than their fathers. Oftentimes, inflexibility passes for maturity in older people—and this doesn't make for good judgment in selecting marriage partners.

I think that young people, properly grounded, can find their maturity in marriage. And the chances of it developing into a tolerant, generous, and understanding maturity, based on mutual respect, are far greater for young married people than for those who seek maturity for themselves first, then search for a mate.

I don't have to look any further than World War II to prove this to my own satisfaction. My wife and I had dozens of close friends and ac-

decorating a house, raising a baby, or sharing a trip as they did into the original physical attraction that drew them together makes for a fulfilling marriage. Too often, when physical attraction subsides with older newlyweds, they are reluctant to replace it with anything which might disturb their well-ordered way of life.

This doesn't apply just to men, either. I know two recently married women—both in their early thirties—who are giving their husbands a hard time on the same count. One was a schoolteacher, the other a successful business woman when they married. The schoolteacher quit working and now has a baby; the female executive continued at her job. The complaints of their husbands are similar.

The schoolteacher's husband told me: "She still treats me as if I were one of her fifth-grade English stu-

that older people have lost. Youngsters can eternally bounce back for another try; can argue enormously and make up the same way. They have a limitless capacity for living, and they often need every bit of it to survive the early years of marriage. But they have it when they need it, and that's what counts.

I have two girls in grammar school and a boy entering high school. I hope all of them can attend college. But I also hope that all of them can find the fulfillment of marriage before they lose the zest for it. I hope they can enjoy their own offspring as we enjoyed ours—while we were still young. And I hope they can know the satisfaction of building a successful home together—from scratch.

Maybe I'll change my mind, but I don't think so. I'm all for my children marrying young.