

Is Dignity Out of Style?

There's a time and place for informality, but it can be overdone.

by **Norah Smaridge**
Art by Don Neskee

LAST SUMMER, when friends took us for an automobile ride, we dropped their 15-year-old girl at a home where she had been invited to dinner. Jane had changed her dress—but her feet were bare!

"Anything wrong?" she frowned, her finger on the bell. "Oh, my feet?" She gave them a cursory glance; they weren't a pretty sight. "None of the kids wear shoes in warm weather."

"It seems to be the fashion," her mother said uncertainly. "I think it's going too far—bare feet at dinner. But you know how these teen-agers are about informality!"

Not only teen-agers. Adults, too, make a cult of informality. It saves trouble. It means you can wear a head-scarf to church, finish your manicure in the office, ask your supper guest to help with the dishes.

But sometimes it is hard to take. I, for one, am tired of cab drivers who address me and my 65-year-old mother as "you girls"—but don't stir themselves to open a door or help with a suitcase. And I'd prefer a salesclerk to listen to my needs instead of engaging me in chatter: "I bought this little dress myself, dear—but it'll look even better on you, with *your* hips!"

We Americans surely must be the most informal people in the world. Yet, paradoxically, we are fascinated by the ceremonies, customs, and protocol of other countries. Perhaps we sense that they are a symbol for something real and meaningful, like a sense of respect for human dignity.

In my home, we stand on ceremony. We don't dress for dinner, or have callers announced by a butler; we're not in that income bracket. But we do observe many formalities that others dispense with. We have found that they make for smoother living and pleasanter relationships.

We are formal, for instance, in our use of titles and names. Our family physician is *Doctor Stewart* to us and to our children; never "Doc Stewart" or "Doc." And our neighbor, Captain Jensen, gets his proper title, not "Cap" or "Skipper."

When the youngsters were small, we explained what is meant by such titles as doctor, captain, or professor. We told them how long and hard these men had to study and work to earn their titles. We made them understand



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- Invalid
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