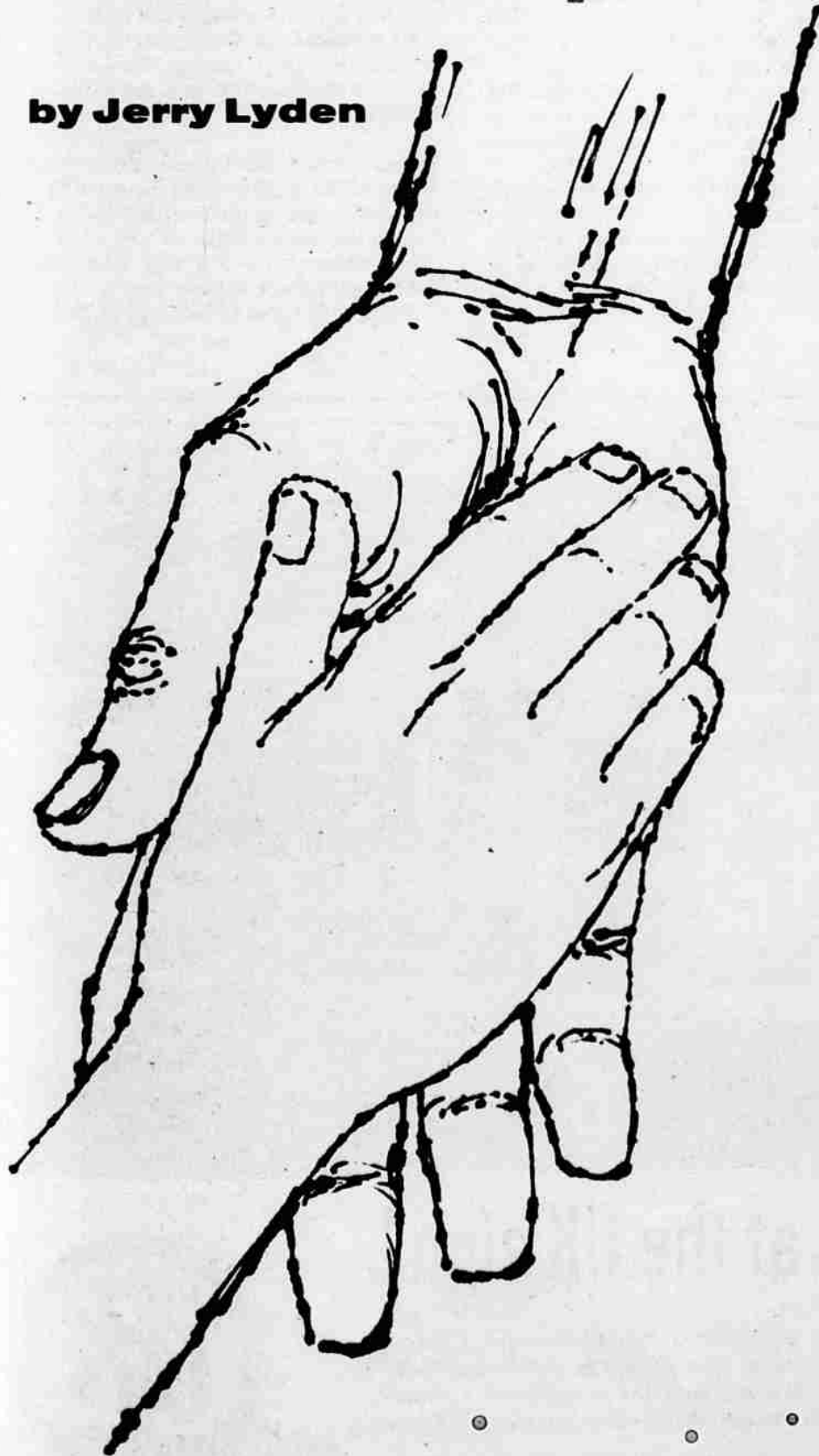


In this remarkable true story, a parent describes the painful process by which he discovered the motives behind his boy's misbehavior.

My Rebellious Son Taught Me About Discipline

by Jerry Lyden



OUR FAMILY was camped in a national forest a few years ago. I had broiled steaks over an open fire and we were seated at the table. Turning to my youngest son I said, "Please get the salt. It's over on the fireplace."

"Why me?" he asked. "Why do I always have to be the one to get things?"

Controlling my voice I said, "You're not always the one. We all do our share, son, and you're expected to do yours."

I could see a cloud of dissent passing over his face. But I knew he couldn't produce a reasonable argument.

"Get it, please," I said patiently.

"I'm always the one," he growled.

My voice rose. "I'm waiting, son."

He dragged himself to his feet, got the salt, slammed it down on the table, and slumped into his camp chair.

"Look at me, son!" I shouted.

He turned his head away, but still I could see his lips puffed out in an all-too-usual pout. "I want to leave the table," he said.

"May I leave the table, please?"

He said nothing.

I'd had it. I stood up and grabbed him by the arm with intentional firmness. I'll never forget the look of terror in his eyes as I yanked him away.

"No! No!" he screamed, causing other campers to glance at us. "Don't! Please don't!"

His unmanly pleas coupled with the memory of his insolence were gasoline to my sparking anger.

I swung him around and gave him a whack with my open hand that must have stung like a hatful of wasps.

In a storm of wild wailing, he hid himself. Campers stared at me.

What had I done? Only my duty toward my son. Yet I felt accused. Accused of the crime of teaching my child discipline!

I quieted down enough to hear him sobbing disconsolately. Surely he would behave now. I began to soften. Speaking kindly, I said, "Come on back to the table, son."

Red-eyed, he slowly came and sat on the edge of his chair.

I spoke with a prayerful effort to penetrate his understanding. "Son, the only reason I discipline you is for your own good. You'll be disliked and miserable all your life unless you learn a little respect."

The corners of his lips turned down in a disdainful sneer. Insolently he sniffed.

"Leave the table immediately!"

He did.

Soon after I also left the table—to walk in the woods and think. Think! My inability to get through to my child galled and perplexed me for many reasons. For one thing, I felt that what was true in business or the military was true in the home: if things aren't right, it's the commanding officer's fault.

Yet I considered myself an expert in discipline. I knew there could be no such thing as military organization without strict and unquestioning obedience. I'd known people who died because orders were disobeyed. In the same way I knew that peaceful society depends on a decent respect for one's fellow men. Delinquency, crime, and social decay are the wages of disrespect.

Well, this father, at least, was doing his best, I thought. Yet I had on my hands a potential delinquent.

The vacation was ruined. We returned home. Day by day my dilemma grew into a nightmare of defiance and punishment. Reason and firmness on my part brought out

(Continued on page 18)



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