

Family Council

Editors note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of a family disagreement presented to the Council. The Council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers. Edited by Mrs. Alma Dennis. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Mrs. B. Z. - He's a brute but I haven't the heart to walk out.

Mrs. G. G. - She's a nervous wreck and has a blood condition, too. She should leave him.

Mrs. B. Z. - I don't want to break up my 25-year marriage if anything can be saved of it. I was 16 when I married Boyd and trouble began five months later when I refused to adopt a baby born to a girl Boyd's best friend had gotten in trouble. He's been hateful to me ever since.

After five years we adopted a daughter who's now 20 and married. We also have our own children, a girl 17 and a boy 13. All these years I've been getting up at 6:30 to wait on Boyd. The house is clean, his clothes are always ready, his meals are on time. But he not only fails to appreciate anything and take be out once in a while, but he also enjoys ruining any small pleasures I try to give myself. If I stay up to watch TV, he yells that I'm losing sleep. If I invite my friends over, he insults them. If I go to the movies alone, I come home to find the kids in tears from his ranting. How long should I endure this?

Mrs. G. G. - I'm the friend Mrs. Z. invites over. I've been her confidant for 14 years. I'm the only friend who still calls on the Z's. Even my husband can't take Boyd's boorishness any more. Boyd has alienated everyone who'd like to be friendly.

Mrs. Z. has taken more than any human being should be expected to suffer. For the past seven years she's been under doctor's care. I've seen her when she can hardly move her arms or fingers because they swell up so from a heart and blood condition. She's a nervous wreck from the turmoil Boyd creates with her and the children over bedtime, going out, entertaining and other everyday matters.

I feel as close to her as a sister and I know she doesn't have to put up with this indefinitely. Her mother lives alone in a big house and she could take the children and move in there. But she still thinks Boyd will turn human.

The Council: From a half-dozen specific problems presented by Mrs. Z., and verified by her friend, we have isolated one—the unbearable tension between husband and wife. This example indicates the futility of hoping that time will dissolve deep personality defects. Mrs. Z. has given the stalemate almost 25 years of time. Yet she and Boyd must proceed as they should have done—cleared the air—during those early quarrels when she was 16. Now it's a thick wall of smog between them, with Boyd retreating to sleep, hermitism and spite, and his wife to illness, self pity and surrender.

One of the signs of good mental health is self assertion, plus a respect for the self assertion of others. In that way, much benefit can result from marital spats. In fact, one psychologist claims that conflict in marriage is normal and that it's the avoidance of conflict that piles up disaster. In avoiding the "having-it-out" sessions demanded by Boyd's high-handedness, Mrs. Z. has merely postponed the inevitable through painful, wasted years.

Perhaps that first quarrel, the one about taking an illegitimate baby into their home as a favor, ought to have been taken to a wise mediator—a pastor, a social worker—rather than be snappishly ended by Mrs. Z.'s holler-than-thou refusal and Boyd's permanent sulking.

At any rate, much genuine love can grow out of grave, "creative" quarreling—the sort which isn't dead-end that is, always bogging down in name calling, weeping, rehashing of irrelevancies. Mrs. Z.'s salvation will come from being able both to speak up and to listen to Boyd. At this stage she will need the encouragement of a marriage counselor to give her confidence, as well as specific procedures.

It looks very much as though bodily ills are proclaiming the presence of bottled-up tensions which aren't released through talk and action. Resentment must come out somewhere. If Mrs. Z. starts expressing hers in a kind though steadfast way, the physical symptoms may ease.



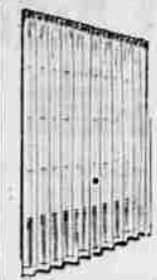
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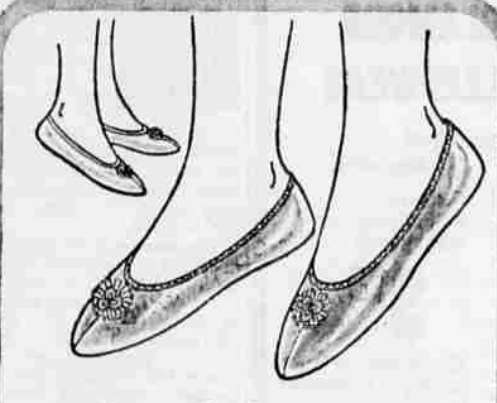
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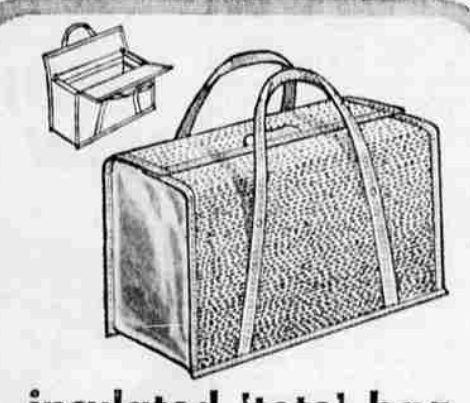
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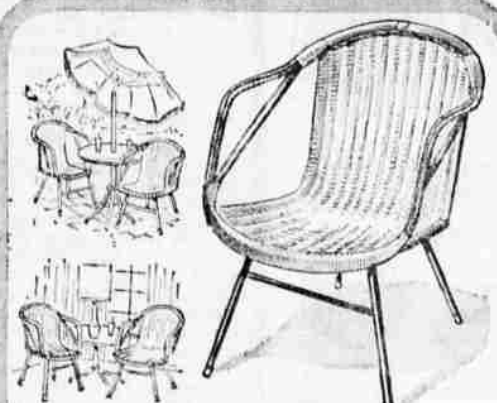
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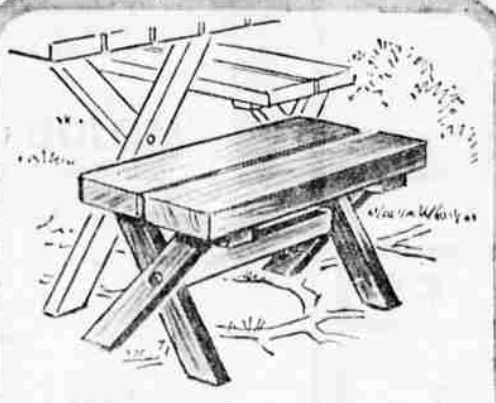
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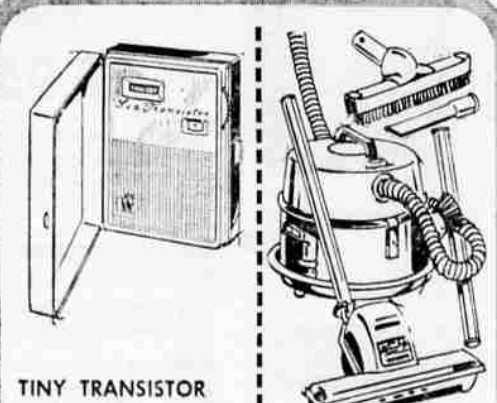
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