

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 Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Jocelyn R. - He wastes huge sums of money on expensive toys for Nicky.

Ralph R. - I'm away so much that I must impress him with what I send.

Jocelyn R. - Our son Nicky is 3½. I'm trying to convince my husband that the elaborate toys he sends home for him are a waste of money. Simple things like a phonograph record or a picture puzzle would do.

But yesterday a huge carton arrived with an electric robot which can answer questions. Ralph sent it from Chicago. It cost over \$25 and Nicky is bored stiff with it. Some of the other presents might be all right if only Ralph were around more to show Nicky how to use them. I'm not much help, for example, demonstrating how to enjoy the football and helmet which arrived last week.

If Nicky can't have his dad around, expensive toys don't make up for it.

Ralph R. - I'm a Science Reporter for a news service and I'm away from home a good deal, following the conventions and the latest research experiments. Wherever I am, I never forget Jocelyn and Nicky. And I make it a point to send Nicky something impressive "with love from Daddy."

I assume Jocelyn will read the instructions on the box and introduce Nicky to the toy with "pomp and circumstance" and plenty of flourish! If she'd handle her end effectively, Nicky would know that my absences mean special treats for him and he'd come to view them as an exciting game he and I are playing.

As for the small, everyday toys like blocks and pegboards, Jocelyn can pick them up at the dime store. They're not special, as I want my gifts to be.

The Council: James Russell Lowell said what Jocelyn's trying to say, only he put it into verse in "The Vision of Sir Launfal":

"The gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

She's trying to tell you, Ralph, that a \$25 toy without you around to add your special oomph isn't worth a dime. Making a child happy through playthings depends primarily upon a parent's presence. We've seen children play delightedly with a pail of water (\$0.00) and an old paint brush, while their mother sat on a stoop reading. In the bright sunshine they were "painting" the house. And on rainy days they stood at the kitchen sink pouring water from pitchers and sieves, while their mother did the ironing.

But we appreciate Ralph's motives and pinpoint the problem as one requiring more thought. Merely expending huge sums for big-dimensional gifts isn't necessarily going to "warm up" Nicky toward his dad. Two other factors are important: Jocelyn's "fill-in" to make the dull substances come alive, and Ralph's careful selection of what he sends. We agree with Jocelyn that size and price aren't important. What will impress Nicky and keep his father's presence fresh is a modest offering which fills a current need.

Suppose, for example, the movie "Pinocchio" is in town. Well, Ralph sends the book. Jocelyn reads it to Nicky. Ralph sends the disc. Jocelyn plays it for Nicky. They sing a few of the tunes. Then when dad returns, they all go to see the picture together. Such gifts do not dangle in a void. They are love-linked.

Actually toys are a tool. They teach. But they are also a symbol. They "remind." We all know the hold an old Teddy bear can have on a child. It spells home, the familiar. Similarly, the toys which Ralph leaves with Nicky must be "father-touched," and associated with warm, loving communion with both parents. Anything else is just a big box.

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