



Do You Put Your Family

First?

BY ROBERT GARDNER

Judge of the Superior Court of Orange County, California

Here, in down-to-earth language, a noted judge offers one of the simplest and most effective ways to stamp out delinquency.

AN INTELLIGENT, cultured woman, a community leader, recently said to me, "Judge Gardner, what can I do to help with this dreadful juvenile-delinquency problem?"

"Why don't you go home and be with your family?" I replied. She was shocked, and I suspect I lost a vote right then and there.

I have read many of the flood of recent magazine articles about juvenile delinquency. They are written by all kinds of experts: doctors, sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, child-guidance people, family counselors, and just plain old expert experts. Most of them agree that the basic problem

lies in the home. Is the father no longer the head of the family? Is the mushrooming divorce rate destroying the American home? Is morality out-moded? Has modern child psychology destroyed basic concepts of discipline? Is your child suffering from a traumatic neurosis based on the uncertainties of modern civilization? Does he have an Oedipus complex, emotional insecurity, a deep-seated psychic disturbance? Is it radioactive fallout, horror comics, sunspots?

These articles are good. Each reflects a learned approach to a troublesome problem, but their scope is so big. The reader's feeling of inadequacy bal-

loons into an inferiority complex from the erudite tone of the articles. What can the reader, a baffled parent, do about this vast problem? The average answer is, "It's too much for me." But there is a simple thing each of us can do to make our children's home a better, healthier place. That is: stay home! Simple, isn't it?

When we were a rural society and lived on farms, we were a nation of families. During the day the boys worked in the fields with the father and the girls worked in the house with the mother. They were all together for breakfast, dinner, and supper. In the evenings they talked together, read together, sang together, perhaps even prayed together.

Now much of this is impossible. Most fathers leave in the morning, are gone all day, and return in the evening. That leaves the mornings and evenings for our families. If other fathers are like me in the morning, that is not the time to make friends or influence children. I awake in a tragic and somber mood that hangs over me like a heavy smog for several hours. The less said about morning sociability with the family the better.

That leaves the evening to gather my family around me to establish, in a short time, a normal

family relationship. But where am I? I'm at a meeting. Be it Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Exchange, Civitan, Chamber of Commerce, Red Cross, Community Chest, Sons of Union Veterans, Boys Club, Moose, Eagles (Raccoons, Weasels, or Yellow-Billed Sapsuckers)—there are hundreds of them, and they meet all the time. If you aren't there, you are considered just possibly a bit un-American. When the club itself is not meeting, there are committee meetings, subcommittee meetings, and sometimes sub-subcommittee meetings to determine when committee meetings should be held. And that takes care of dear old Dad.

WHERE IS MOTHER? Home? In the morning, at least, we will assume she is. Then she has a noon meeting with the P.T.A. or an Ebell luncheon. Then a fast afternoon with the women's club, Friday Afternoon Club, Thursday Afternoon Club, or any other afternoon club. Home for dinner? Maybe. But perhaps it'll be the P.T.A., Town Meeting, Civic League, Friends of the Library, the Eastern, Western, or Northern Star, Altrusa, or the female auxiliary of one of the male clubs.

I don't mean to pick on any particular groups. These just come to mind. They are all good organizations with commendable aims, but your children are as much orphans if you are meeting with the leaders of your community as they would be if you were drunk at the local saloon.

The point is that we have become badly over-organized. These organizations are important, but not vital. If we awoke tomorrow and every one of them was nonexistent, the sun would still shine, the birds would still sing, men and women would still quarrel—the world would go on. And by evening a few dozen new organizations would exist, because we have become the most gregarious country in history. Unfortunately, our family life is suffering, and our baby sitters are getting rich.

I have been on a circuit of after-dinner speeches for several years. That is probably one reason I am so aware of the large number of organizations. For years I have told audiences, "Why don't you go home and be with your family instead of listening to me?"

Everyone laughs, slaps his leg, and says, "What a card this Gardner is!" Then they invite me back the next year to make the same talk to the same audience. I'm getting discouraged. The only result so far is that my own children hardly recognize me



Robert Gardner

A graduate of the University of Southern California, Robert Gardner has had more than 20 years' experience as a lawyer and judge. In 1938 he was appointed judge of the city court of Newport Beach, Calif., at the age of 26 and was believed to be the youngest jurist in the United States at the time. He was appointed to his present post in 1947 by Chief Justice Earl Warren, then governor of California. During World War II Judge Gardner served on the staff of Admiral Nimitz in the Pacific and left the Navy as a lieutenant commander.

To emphasize the danger of this organization business, I often use myself as an example. I was overseas for two years during World War II. We had a daughter who was about a year old when I left and three years old when I returned. As I spent two years on various unromantic Pacific Islands, I felt very sorry for myself. I had rationalized my thinking to the point where it was my daughter who was suffering because of my absence. Here was this poor child growing up in an unbalanced home—a potential female Jack the Ripper.

I told myself, "If you ever get back and you have another child, you're going to spend all your time with her to make up for what daughter No. 1 missed while you were away." After the war ended, I returned home, resumed the practice of law, and took part in community activities as a young man wanting to make a place for himself in the community. I joined everything—service, fraternal, civic, veterans, business, and professional clubs—all the groups I could get into. I headed drives and chaired committees.

Then I became a judge, and subsequently a politician. I became an after-dinner speaker—not a good one but an available one. I was busy. Meetings. Meetings.

One day I noticed in the local paper that Mrs. Gardner had given birth to another daughter. I can't say that it came as a complete surprise, but I certainly took it in stride. I continued with my numerous organizations. Our community must have been a better place to live in, because I lavished so much time, care, and affection on it.

Then I did a tour of duty as judge of the juvenile court. As I watched those unfortunate youths come through my court, I began to realize that many of them were there because of the lack of a very simple thing—a home, complete with two parents. I applied this to myself. I found I fit the picture perfectly. Suddenly I realized that daughter No. 2 was now three years old, and I had seen little more of her than I had of my first child when I was 2,000 miles away.

I stopped, took stock of myself, and changed my way of life. I began to miss meetings, turn down committees, refuse speaking engagements. Somewhat ruefully, I will have to admit that the community has apparently gone on as well as before. But now I know my family; we are together; we are a family. It's wonderful. I know that one day it will pay big dividends. I recommend it highly.

