



# let's start building

by Jean Komaiko

ONCE THERE WAS a man who acted like a king, and was treated like one. He walked with pride and he carried a cane. His children called him Sir and brought his pipe and slippers when he was weary. When he was hungry, his wife, who called him Mister, brought him homemade pie. When he commanded, ears pricked, heels clicked. This man ruled for hundreds of years, but he is dead now and so is his spirit. His name was Father.

His son is a very different sort of man. When he comes home after a day of hard work, his wife, up on a ladder painting walls, calls out, "Put on the dinner." His children are sprawled before the television screen and say nothing. When the phone rings they answer, "Sorry, but I don't think he's come home."

After getting dinner and tucking in the children, Pop shoos the cat out of his favorite chair and settles down with the papers. What he reads may include such items as "American Men Are Lousy Fathers," "Is Dad a Flop?" or perha, "The Recent Decline and Fall of Father."

"What's wrong," the writers ask, "that you can't be romantic with your wife? Tell her you love her, and say it with flowers! What's happened to make you love your work more than your home? You realize, of course, that you're killing yourself with tensions! What a tragedy that you've abdicated the role of father, and left child-rearing to your wife."

"When father becomes a figurehead, son becomes a delinquent. When father relaxes his grip, his daughter goes astray. Where are your values, Man? You were once a pillar of the church and a patron of the arts, but above all you were a patriarch in your own home."

With this sort of assault, it's a wonder Father isn't somewhat punchy. Frankly, I'm one wife and

mother who is sorry for Pop. I don't want to restore the monarchy, because I like my partnership marriage with its emphasis on sharing, not serving. I'm glad to have voice and a veto in family plans. Nonetheless the man in my marriage—the man in yours—deserves more understanding and gratitude and friendship than he's getting.

How can we give him these things, and help create a healthier and happier home environment? Perhaps an examination of the kind of man he is, and the degree to which his characteristics contribute to his present situation, would help bring about a real give-and-take equilibrium.

1. Being adjustable, Pop has surrendered his

dominant role with grace, instead of whining or dreaming of past glories. Father once had the final say, but if he gets in the last word it's only because everyone else has had his turn. The home has become child-centered, and children are reared on permissiveness rather than authority. His wife shares his bed and board, and also his former male prerogatives—she votes, holds property, can sue, run for office, or make a contract.

2. Because he's a good sport, Pop not only has accepted his changed role, but he has gladly given new privileges to his wife. He lets her organize parties, map vacations, and plan the children's education and culture. She runs, rules, and decorates his home, and he tells everyone what a clever



When fathers feel the need of appreciation, they often have to go no farther than their children. Of course, the kids have their own way of expressing themselves, as shown by these examples (with original spelling) from the Milwaukee Sentinel's annual "My Pop's Tops" contest:

"My pop lets me take acordine lessons. He lets me practice outside. When I practice outside, he goes inside. He can tell better from a distance."

"He can fix the wachamichine. The darn thing is all the time bust."

"Pop always finds the time to read the comic book to my little brother Jackie. Why even if Jackie goes to sleep ahead of time, my pop reads the

comic book to him. What I think is my pop likes to read comic books."

"Every child should love their father because if it was not for their father where would they be? Nowhere, that's where they'd be. If it was not for fathers, you wouldn't see hardly no children around Milwaukee."

"I know more about it than most kids when I say my pop is tops. Other kids have their first father but we're on our third one already."

"My pop never talks back to my mom. But when she gets after him to mow the lawn, pop will say that he is sick and has to lay down and he does. Could any son have a greater pop than this?"



# up FATHER!



Stories always sound better when Daddy tells them.

manager she is and why she rates a medal as loving wife and mother.

3. Pop's generosity includes surrender of his checkbook and wallet. It also compels him to work



hard, travel far, and compete endlessly to get ahead. He buys on time, borrows with interest, and will go to any lengths so that his family can have anything they want.

4. His humility enables Pop to make sacrifices without expecting or getting thanks. While his wife and children wear fine and colorful clothes, he is content to be the most muted male in the animal kingdom. He buys a home in the suburbs so the children can have sunshine and light, but he lives like a mole, coming and going in the dark. He knows he'll probably die before his wife, but instead of "living it up," he buys insurance to care for her and the children when he won't be around.

5. His sense of fairness compels Pop to make his

wife happy, so if she wants to work, she can. But he also wants her to be rested and healthy, so he assumes some of the household chores. He changes the baby, waxes the floors, and does other things to enable her to go out occasionally. It's true that wives work in all countries, but nowhere do husbands pitch in so readily as in America. When a European was recently asked why he didn't help his schoolteacher wife with the housework, he said, "What kind of man would I be if I did? And how could my wife possibly respect me?"

6. Pop is lots of fun and likes to have his good times with his family. Though he's accused of hiding on the golf course or in a bowling alley, the truth is that he spends more hours camping and clubbing with his clan than many other fathers. If he doesn't run a Scout troop, a Sunday-school class, or a Little League team, he probably umpires his boy's tennis games, or accompanies his daughter to the theater or museums. He shows up at PTA meetings. He barbecues and swims with his children. Not long ago I found one father playing hide-and-seek with his son as they shopped in a supermarket.

7. He's devoted, though too often children remember only the times he was tired or cross. They forget that he is always backing them up with love and concern. "It's amazing," one college girl said, "but my Dad writes the most tender, loving letters. I never realized he cared. I always thought of Mother as giving the love."

Now I believe that Father needs a press agent, someone who could corner for him a small portion of the esteem that goes to his spouse. He's much too decent to demand his rights. Along with his children he treats Mother's Day seriously, showering his wife with flowers, gifts, and affection.

But on Father's Day he gets his usual necktie, the symbolic collar of his duty.

Five million copies of Whistler's mother hang in American living rooms. But who except the cartoonists have painted Pop?

Since there are no organizations to take Father under their wing or promote his cause, it's time wives and mothers realized his plight and tried to restore his prestige. We could make a good start with small gestures.

For example, if the TV set were de-emphasized, the children might listen to him talk and be surprised at what an honorable and knowledgeable man he is. If you respect his needs—a little order, a little quiet, a special dessert—so might they.

If you make sure the children not only know that he provides them with all their food, clothing, and education, but also backs them up spiritually and socially, they might appreciate him more.

It would also be a good idea if you could take some of the pressure for material things off his mind. For instance, the next time you want a gadget or the children want a new bike, try saying, "Your father works hard. He cares for us very well. It doesn't seem quite fair to ask him for new things when the old ones will do nicely."

Perhaps this doesn't sound like much to restore the status of a man who once was king. But it's a start in the right direction. Father has long lost the notion of being the benign autocrat of Clarence Day's time, but he would surely respond to genuine recognition of his true place in the family. There's no doubt that concern and respect for him as a man would encourage him to be an even better Father than he has been. And easing of the strife, tension, and need to compete might even increase his life span.