

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE WITH DICK CLARK

by his wife

THEY TELL ME that Dick is a big star nowadays, that his "American Bandstand" every afternoon on ABC and the "Dick Clark Show" on Saturday are among the big, big audience attractions. They tell me that 30 million teen-agers think he's the most. And they ask, "Has his fame changed your lives?"

Let me tell you what has changed our lives. Little Dickie! Dickie Clark, born on a frosty January morning in 1957, now a 31-pound package of atomic energy who, if he maintains his present explosive pace, will surely be the first human being to reach the moon.

We had company the other afternoon and I saw Dickie padding through the living room, his lips pursed in a way I've come to recognize. I called him to me and made a cup of my hand. "Spit," I said. Out came my favorite bracelet, one wet bangle at a time.

Dickie has an unshakeable faith that his father spends his afternoons inside our 21-inch TV set. And why not? Whenever we tune in the "Bandstand" program, there he is. Once, Dick taped a program ahead of time and came home to watch it. Dickie paid no attention whatever to his father-in-the-flesh but watched the TV program intently. When Dick made a commonplace remark, such as "Please pass the peanuts," little Dickie turned, shushing him quite vigorously. "You be quiet and watch my daddy," he ordered.

In most ways, though, our lives are about the same. Dick's, continuing thoughtfulness always amazes me—like the time he gave me my second wedding ring. You see, our wedding in Salisbury, Md., in 1952 was a bit hectic because he had just gone to work for WFIL in Philadelphia and didn't have time to do the things grooms usually do. So I got the license, arranged for the honeymoon and bought the wedding ring. Being a feminine, romantic type, I guess that bothered me enough to show.

Five years later, on the same day we brought one-week-old Dickie home from the hospital, Dick gave me a tiny, gift-wrapped box. And what do you think? Inside, I found a new rubber nipple for the baby's bottle and inside the nipple a shiny, diamond wedding band. It was so sweet I cried.

I suppose every successful man's wife runs into women who ask, "Aren't you proud of him?" Of course, I'm proud. But for a different reason. They're usually thinking about his big fan mail and his fat contracts. I'm thinking of his interest in teen-agers and their problems.

Stop and try to name three people who are in favor of teen-agers. I mean big-name folks who come right out and say that today's youngsters are okay except for a very few baddies. Most lists I've heard include my husband's name—and that makes me very proud indeed.

Sometimes Dick tells me about the kids who come to the studio and ask his advice. I think he's persuaded more students to finish their high school education than anyone else in America.

What really upsets him, though, are newspaper headlines about teen-agers. Each time he reads one that says, "Teen-Ager Crashes Car" or "Teen-Ager Robs Gas Station," it hurts him. When he was invited to speak to a group of editors, he let them have it. "You're making the phrase 'teen-group' synonymous with hoodlums and hooligans, which it decidedly is not," he protested. Then he begged, "Editors, please give the teen-agers a break."

Moments like that make me proud indeed. Most of those who criticize teen-agers surely never watch Dick's programs. If they did, they would see every boy wearing a tie and jacket, every girl in a skirt and nobody in jeans or shorts. One night Dick came home to dinner beaming.

"I was so proud of my gang today," he said. "What happened?"

He told of having Al Hibbler, the blind singer, as a guest, and how he feared that some kid, not knowing Al was blind, might react in a way that would embarrass him.

"I explained the situation to them before he came on," Dick told me. "Al sang a couple of ballads—not the usual things we do on the show—and while he sang it was just like a church. Really quiet. When he finished, the applause almost lifted the roof. Al and I were both touched by their wonderful behavior."

ONE DAY, a deaf-and-dumb boy joined Dick's audience. Nobody knew who he was or where he came from. He just lined up at the door with the others and walked in. At first, some of the other boys and girls were hesitant, then one of the most popular girls introduced herself and led him onto the floor in the first "Ladies Choice" dance. Other girls did the same thing, and that lonely, silent boy had a grand time. Nobody coached those girls to "be nice." They acted naturally.

When you live with a man for seven years, you think you know him. Sometimes, I wonder. Actually, long before we were mar-

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