



When Jimmy Flynn was in our office the other day he said to me, "Andy, when are you going to write something about all the good kids in town, instead of this ecology stuff?"

As many of you know, Jimmy's the Juvenile Officer on the Barnstable Police Force, and if there's anyone who knows how many good kids there are, and who they are, it's probably he.

He knows, too, how many, not-so-good kids there are, and who they are; in many instances, he also knows why, I believe. He's in a better position than most to see which kids get headed in the wrong direction and to understand some of the reasons.

Jimmy is also a member of the Park and Recreation Commission, and in that capacity he gives a lot of time and attention to youngsters who need organized recreation.

In answer to his question, I can only tell him it seems to me quite as necessary to insure that all the good kids inherit a decent place to live and raise their families when they grow up, as to highlight what the good kids are doing.

Jimmy's next comment, "That wouldn't sell newspapers, would it?" is still bothering me. I think it probably would sell newspapers just as well as stories about what's going on at the town dump.

For Jimmy, and others who feel as he does, let me try to explain.

One reason I don't write about what good kids are doing is because I don't know. I'm not in close touch with kids of any kind, good or bad, although I am in daily touch with the parents of children in trouble, and I earn my living doing what I can to help such parents help their children.

Sometimes in the course of daily routines, I see signs of youngsters around the neighborhood, evidence they are living nearby, but for the most part, my contacts with them are few and casual, though friendly.

My own schedule precludes much personal communication, since I'm working most of my waking hours. When the neighborhood children ride their bikes up and down the street, we wave to each other, as I drive, carefully, in and out of my driveway.

When the scouts are selling cookies or other items, they knock at my door, knowing they'll always be welcomed and are certain to make a sale.

During the months they attend school, I see knots of children waiting for the bus each morning. I wave, and if they are paying any attention, usually some wave back.

What are all the good kids doing with their time? I haven't the foggiest notion, to be honest.

I'm not too proud of that statement. It makes me feel guilty to admit I'm uninvolved in the lives of these children growing up all around me. If I had kids of my own, probably my efforts would be channelled more toward their individual welfare.

In spite of feeling remote from what most youngsters are doing, I'm not unconcerned for them, however; I do care about them, and I do want them to have a good world to grow up in and the advantages I had -- even some I didn't have.

The reason behind my support of ecological and environmental protection isn't a selfish one. It seems the nicest things about the world I knew as a child are being destroyed or already have been destroyed, and children coming along today will miss out on knowing things that were important to me when I was a child. I regret they must grow up without these experiences.

Maybe you don't miss what you never have had; maybe you do, though. Maybe there's a sense of loss, incompleteness, and maybe we, who never knew the carrier pigeon, for instance, do feel somehow cheated because the species is forever gone.

There was a freedom we enjoyed as children that's no longer available to youngsters; it's no longer safe for them to wander the

village without parental supervision. Too many cars, too many strangers, too many places children are unwelcome or might be in danger, threaten them.

Supervision was provided, for us, as we wandered alone or in twos and threes, by all adult residents of any neighborhood.

People took time to speak to us if we were doing something we shouldn't. We accepted this universal parenting as natural. We knew it was supported at home and respected it.

Today's children accept parental discipline exclusively, if any at all. Should a child answer back in a disrespectful tone, the remonstrating adult is, and knows he is, powerless to teach the child of another family to keep a civil tongue in his head.

It was not always so. Time was when a saucy response elicited instant reprisal, no matter who the adult and child were. Today an adult who lays a hand on a neighbor's naughty child is liable to be sued for assault and battery.

The environmental surroundings are far more restrictive for youngsters in 1975 than was true in 1935. We played at the edges of several different ponds in summer, catching pollywogs, turtles, fish and frogs. We disturbed no one and no one objected to our activities.

We played at the boat shop, got under foot, went along for the ride when a man went out in the work boat to tow a sailing craft to a mooring. We ran through the sheds, played hide-and-seek in the sail lofts, learned to row the shop skiffs, and caught minnows and eels off the docks using quahogs begged from the Oyster Shanty for bait.

No one objected and we didn't bother anyone unduly. A kid who made a nuisance of himself was banished and was too ashamed to return.

In winter we skated on the ponds; there was no rink, of course. Some years the ponds didn't freeze solid enough for safe skating, but they did often enough so we learned to skate.

When spring came we searched the woodlands for wild-flowers, took note of which birds returned as the days grew longer and warmer, and usually ventured our first icy swim of the season during April vacation.

In fall we collected autumn leaves and learned, the hard way, to identify poison ivy; we walked the swamps, green, mossy and damp. We came home with wet feet, perhaps, but we'd had an experience of great stillness, a soft silence surrounding us in the quiet of the boggy swampy lowland at the edge of time.

We didn't consciously recognize this place as one where our primeval ancestors stopped being water creatures and began to be land animals, but when we did learn about that, we recalled the place, the way it looked, felt and smelled.

Do children today have this opportunity? Some do, if they can be safely allowed to wander alone through the remaining woodlands, fields, swamps, hillsides, marshes, and along the edges of ponds.

Most, unfortunately, never know the joy of being by themselves in a totally natural place. If they go on a hike, they are among a group of youngsters, accompanied by an adult leader.

If they go for a swim, the beach is crowded, and the sounds of breaking waves and rattling stones are drowned out by noisy conversations, cries of excitement or joy, shrieks of other kids -- and often of their mothers.

The few swampy places left are nearly all ringed with houses and backyards; they've been filled for roads and shopping centers. The silences we remember exist only in our memories. In Osterville, I know of only one such place left undisturbed; there were a dozen thirty years ago.

There are still some ponds accessible to the public. There children still swim and play -- but only a specified places, and only at times when a lifeguard is on duty. (I've nothing against lifeguards.) There is still much to be said for having known you were the only human living thing swimming in the whole pond.

As these things are lost, others will be lost that now are taken for granted, unless some way is found to preserve them. We don't preserve them for ourselves so much as for the generations of good kids coming after us. We've already had them, you know.

That's the only answer I can give you, Jimmy. I care about the environment because I care, just as much as you do in my own way, about the good kids in town. I want them to have the same good times and learning experience I was lucky enough to have when I was growing up.

They were important to me, and I think they were important to all youngsters, if only all could know them.

Each of us, in his own way, does what he can, directly or indirectly, to keep the world decent for kids to grow up in. This is the way I do my part. You do your thing differently. Okay.

Okay?