



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

NOTE from a writer friend of ours:

I'm always on the lookout for activities that produce the sound of typing (so my wife will think I'm working) but aren't work. Late last year, I found a good one: publishing a newspaper for the children in the small Connecticut town where I live. The children write articles, draw pictures, and take photographs, and I correct spelling and lay out the pages, using my personal computer and a desktop-publishing program. I try to edit lightly, even if I don't always get the jokes. ("What did the battery say to the apple? I am going to roast your core.")

The children's response to the newspaper, which is called *Junior Journal*, verges on the overwhelming. The first issue was two legal-size pages long, the second was eight, the third was twelve, and the latest was fourteen. The fourteen-page issue could have been twenty pages long, but I ran out of time and money, so I took the opportunity to introduce my elementary-school-age staff to the journalistically significant concept of rejection. That was appropriate, I suppose, because in some ways *Junior Journal* itself is a product of rejection. Voters in the three towns that constitute my regional school district have been making draconian cuts in the school budget. Last year, they defeated the school board's first six proposals. The budget they finally passed called for the elimination of many programs (including foreign-language classes for sixth graders and numerous extracurricular activities) and several staff posi-

tions. Some seniors have been spending almost half their school day in study hall, because the district can't afford to teach them for seven periods. Putting out a newspaper seemed to me and some other people to be one way of making up for part of what the children in my town have lost.

Junior Journal covers a broad spectrum of subjects. In one issue a first grader wrote, "It's not good to put tape on your skin. Reasons: 1. It makes your lips bleed. 2. It makes your lips chapped. You cannot do it on any part of your body." A third grader contributed an advertisement announcing the formation of a pet-sitting service. A second grader wrote a capsule summary of the Second World War: "Once there was a man called Hitler. He was a madman. He wanted to rule the whole world. But the law stopped him."

One story that *Junior Journal's* reporters haven't tackled yet is the story of their town's apparent abandonment of its obligation to educate them. The voters have just passed next year's school budget, and on the first try, but the new budget represents a further cut in services. And there are other woes. The building that houses the sixth through the twelfth grades is falling apart. It was built—in 1972, one year

before the OPEC oil embargo—with lots of optimism and a flood of state aid. The building is two or three times too big, has "pods" instead of classrooms, is heated electrically, and needs two million dollars' worth of repairs. Who will pay? The state, which provided about eighty per cent of the construction cost, is now broke and can't be very generous. In fact, the governor has threatened to cut its education grants to the district by about three-quarters of a million dollars.

The articles that the children do write about school are invariably upbeat. "A loud, cheerful, and long clapping celebration welcomed him with smiling faces," a fourth grader wrote in an article about a visit to the primary school by a local man who had served in the Persian Gulf. The children don't realize yet that their parents and grandparents have been spending their futures for many years now, and our profligacy has caught up with all of us.

Fortunates

BE BELIEVE me, if you have been shut up for a year and a half, it can get too much for you some days," Anne Frank wrote in hiding. "In spite of all justice and thankfulness, you can't crush your feelings. Cycling, dancing, whistling, looking out into the world, feeling young, to know that I'm free—that's what I long for; still, I mustn't show it, because I sometimes think if all eight of us began to pity ourselves, or went about with discontented faces, where would it lead us? I sometimes ask myself, 'Would anyone, either Jew or non-Jew, un-

