

GUEST COLUMN

An Open Letter To A Parent

BY RICHARD W. RILEY
U.S. Secretary of Education

As your children head back to school and you count up the cost of new sneakers, jeans and book bags, you may be wondering if there is anything more you can do to prepare your children for the school year ahead.

"We are in trouble as a nation when one-third of all eighth-graders tell us that they have never discussed their homework with a parent."

My children were dutiful, to be sure, but not impressed by this passing wisdom. I am certain that your son or daughter will feel likewise. But we are in trouble as a nation when one-third of all eighth-graders tell us that they have never discussed their homework with a parent.

You're exhausted from the shopping, a little tired of the summer and deep down, you're glad school has started again. Anything else?

Well, yes. I talk to parents all across the country and find that most of you are worried, frustrated and sometimes just barely coping. The question I am always asked is, "How do I know whether my child is learning what he or she needs to learn?" It's a question full of anxiety and doubt about the real fear that your children may not be getting the "leg up" in life they will need to get ahead. I hear you.

anybody. A parent doesn't need a Ph.D. to make learning a priority in the home. If you haven't made it in life quite the way you expected, you can still make sure that your child does.

Here is my best advice—if a parent or parents will spend one hour with their children each night on their schoolwork this coming year, we will transform this nation. Teachers and schools should explain to you the practical ways you can help your children to learn. That's their job. But you have to set aside the time every day—place value, as it were—on the process of learning.

For me, the essence of education comes down to values, standards, performance and, maybe, what to do about television. So how do we reinvent education? Setting challenging national educational standards is important and we'll get that done. It is also important to raise the quality of teaching and get a fix on how we can help the majority of kids who don't go directly to four-year college "jump start" their careers. We'll make progress on those, too.

A good education can do that. All those stories about children from rough or poor neighborhoods who succeed because a parent insisted that they crack the books make a convincing and telling point—drive, determination and focus still come from the family.

Finally, a word about that friendly monster, television. Children love "Barney" and that's great. And "Beavis and Butthead" is here to stay—of that I am sure. But wouldn't it be refreshing if parents got some help from television producers and executives? Some rule of proportion about violence and a willingness to ask a basic gut question: "Is this good for kids or will this just sell the product?"

But, ultimately, the improvement of our children's education is also a willingness to slow down the pace of our lives to help our children grow. Education starts with values. Most of us who have made a go of it in life have gotten ahead because we had a mom, a dad, a grandparent or a guardian who let us know where they stood about us sticking to our studies.

Some folks say that setting high standards is unfair. I don't. If the students, teachers and parents work together to reach the higher standard. Children who get smart, get smart because they study and take tough courses to meet high standards. If you get beyond the ditto sheets to helping children read novels, create stories, tackle real-life math problems and get into the excitement of science, they will learn more and score higher on tougher tests.

In the end, I suspect, you'll be on your own when it comes to TV. The same little remote control button that can turn "on" your TV can also turn it "off." Try it, then sit back. You may not always win the battle for the remote control, but that may be where you have to start to make the process of learning important again.

Perhaps we didn't like it then, but we know now that the values process worked, and still works. If a parent or a family member places value on integrity, a commitment to excellence and studying hard, children come to school prepared to learn. It's that simple. Parents create the frame; teachers help kids fill in the picture. Parents create the frame; teachers help kids fill in the picture.

Setting standards, then, means encouraging your child to take the tougher course, the tougher teacher. Be careful not to "dumb down" your own child...and don't let the school system do it either.

Getting our kids back to school ultimately is more than a shopping trip for you or me. It's a commitment to the possibility that our children can really have better lives if we all make the effort...together and now.

Here, it is important to point out what may not be so obvious—these values can be stressed to children by

So how do you raise performance and give children a sense that they can do better? A schoolteacher at my children's school had a fondness for quoting Proverbs. Her favorite was, "A wise son loves correction."

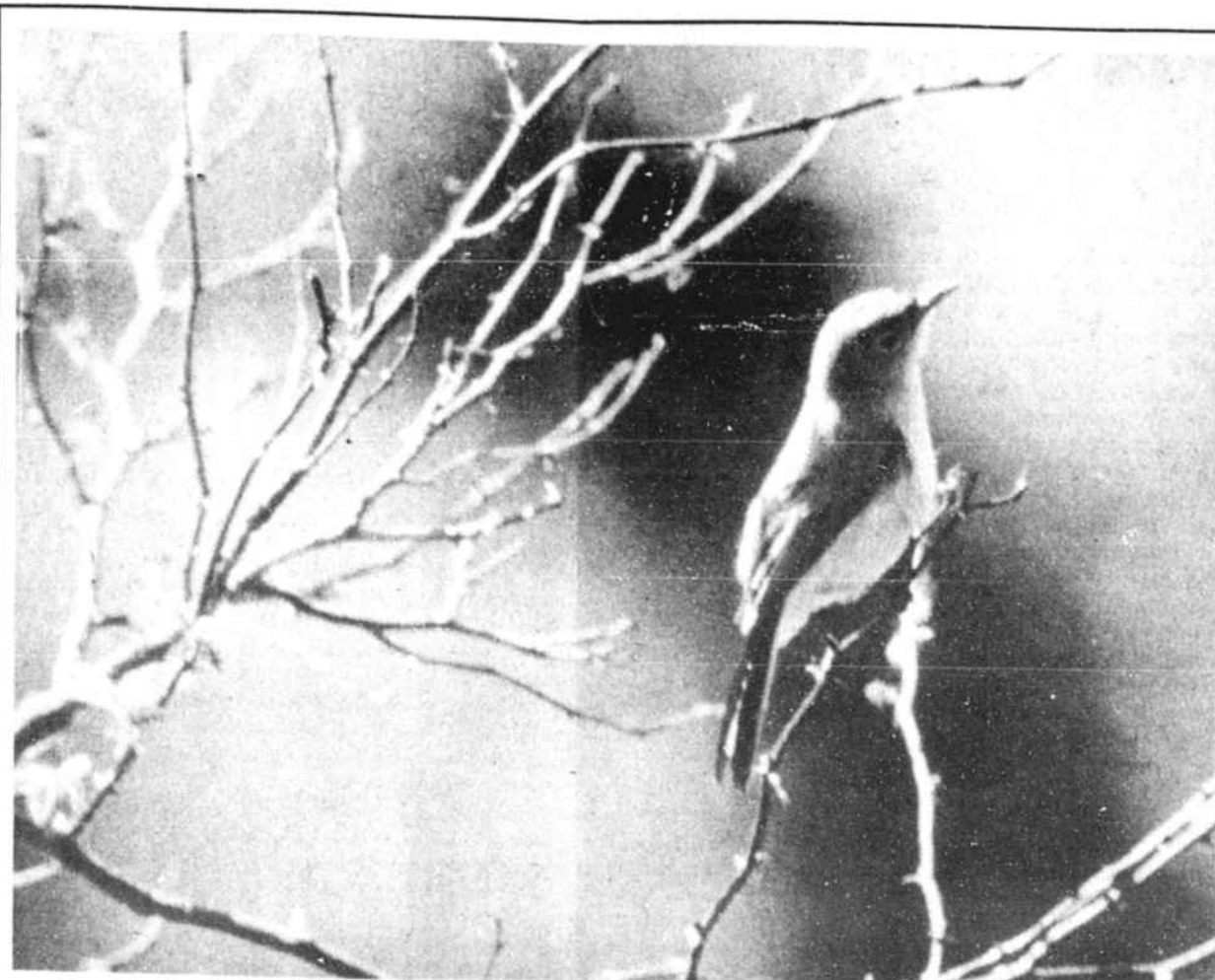


PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

BIRDS SING to let the world know they have chosen a territory in which to nest and feed.

Defending Our Space

BY BILL FAVER

Most of us can relate to the need to occasionally defend our space. Whether it is trespassers on our property or someone close enough to "get in our face," we know what it is like to have to protect the area we call ours.



FAVER

Most animals share the same need with us. Birds are good examples. They continually invade each others' space, though there are no property lines or distinct boundaries.

Some birds will tolerate trespassers at times other than nesting season. Others will overlook intruders except when feeding is taking place. Many species will ignore birds that are not of the same species and will nest within a few feet of each other. But the same bird will vigorously defend the area from one of its own kind.

These territorial birds have several methods of defending their areas. Probably the most common is the use of song. A bird sitting in the treetops singing a melodious tune is not entertaining us, it is telling the

world that area belongs to him. It is his domain and intruders need to take notice.

If the song fails to deter a trespasser, the bird may use a threatening posture or flight to scare the intruder away. This can be diving at the unwelcomed bird, flying or walking toward the stranger, staring him down, and other threats.

Mockingbirds and others who "fight" at reflections in windows, mirrors, or car bumpers are going one step further by resorting to physical force to cause the intruding bird to leave the territory.

Since there are no physical boundaries, the size of a bird's territory may change with the seasons and the abundance of food. After nesting, and with food plentiful, a territory likely will be smaller and less defending takes place. Scarcity of food can cause birds to seek a larger territory and to be generally more defensive.

Territory is vitally important to birds and some will even die in defense of their chosen space. Their life depends on how well they stake out and defend their territory in which to nest and raise young and to obtain food. Think about that next time you hear a moonlight serenade from a mockingbird!

AIDS Fight Is Battle Of Century

To the editor:

I wonder how many Brunswick County residents watched the AIDS program Saturday night? Not many, I'm sure, because the competition included a football game, some not-so-funny sitcoms and the ever-popular country-Western line dancing. People want to be entertained. They don't want to hear about death and dying.

And that's what the disease AIDS is all about...death and dying. There were 310,680 cases reported as of June 1993. More than 11 million people are known to be HIV positive. Predictions are that the number will reach 40 million by the year 2000.

It is no longer a problem confined to the gay community. Ninety percent of the AIDS cases reported in 1993 have been heterosexuals; 14 percent were females, and this year, there are 4,000 children known to be living with and dying from AIDS.

What can ordinary monogamous heterosexuals do to halt the progress of this catastrophic disease? The answer to this question is two-fold: awareness and education.

Wear the red ribbon that signifies you are aware of the impending doom civilization faces if AIDS is left unchecked. Educate yourselves and others as to how this disease is

spread. Dispel the fears that ignorance breeds. Preach abstinence, but stress safe sex. Talk openly and freely to your children and grandchildren about AIDS. You may not be aware of it, but someone you know is HIV positive.

The fight against AIDS is the battle of the century, and the battleground houses the world's population. Each man, woman and child is in harm's way.

Pegge Jaynes
Supply

Smoking Ban Idea Of 'Great Know-Alls'

To the editor:

If and when the smoking ban for Brunswick County comes into effect (and it will) I will not spend another cent in this county. I will go to South Carolina and do all my shopping and dining, and so will all my friends from out of town.

It is evident to me that these Great Know-All People who are making these laws went to college, because they have no common sense, in my opinion. They are driving away tourists and businesses from the county, and the shops and restaurants that are here now will be closing.

What we smokers should do is break the law (since we are crimi-

nals anyway), go to prison and let the state and taxpayers feed and clothe us and take care of all our medical needs—and you can smoke in prison.

Why can't our Great Know-What's-Best-For-Me do-gooders pass a law so I won't have to smell some of the stinking perfume I have to breathe when I eat out or go shopping? I've never heard of smoking making a drunk driver and killing someone.

I heard the other day that each cigarette takes seven minutes off my life. According to the Bible, not even Jesus Christ knew that, but our Great Ones do. Are they God?

C.M. Rusch
Supply

Write Us

The Beacon welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must include the writer's address and telephone number. Under no circumstances will unsigned or anonymous letters be printed. Letters must be legible. We reserve the right to edit libelous comments and to shorten letters. Address letters to *The Brunswick Beacon*, P. O. Box 2558, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.

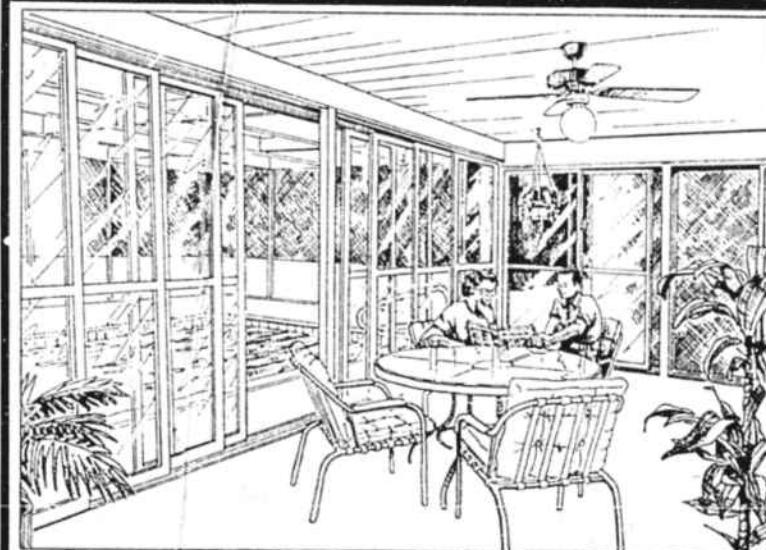
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