

All Youth Strive To Be Accepted By Their Peer Group

The year 1980 will be remembered by me for years to come. Not because it was the year I began running, nor because it was the year Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia set an Olympic marathon record in the Rome games. No, 1980 will always be with me because of a love letter I received from a classmate named Carolyn Davis.

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REFLECTIONS
I was no different than any other 12-year-old in 1980 other than I loved to run and my friends all played basketball at P.S. 136 in St. Albans, N.Y. I had lots of friends and always made sure my girlfriends were pretty enough to meet with the approval of the guys I associated with. I venture to say all youth strive to be accepted by their peer group to a great degree and I was no exception.

Nor was I an exception to the habit children possess of saying exactly what is on their minds with no concern for the feelings of others or ensuing repercussions. Nowadays when I want to say something offensive in a nice way I can be as euphemistic as the best politician. But in 1980 I shot straight from the hip. And whereas today I could use such words as obulent, cherub, portly or full to describe a fat person, in 1980 I called a fat individual fat. So when Carolyn Davis, who must have weighed at least 200 pounds, passed me a note asking if I would be her boyfriend I laughed at her and called her things that made her cry. But I didn't stop there. I showed the note to my friends and they further ridiculed her!

FAT KIDS AND TV
I used this space September 5, 1985, to bring to your attention our children are slunking fitness. Faded information indicating children are unable to attain minimum levels of fitness. And even though I could

discuss how early obesity and inactivity increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, I won't do so here — that subject was adequately discussed in September. What I do want to point out is this: just as I naively ridiculed Carolyn for daring to think I could date a fat girl, how many of our "fat kids" are experiencing similar chiding?

William Dietz Jr., M.D., Ph.D., from the New England Medical Center in Boston and Steven Gortmaker, Ph.D., from the Harvard School of Public Health both have stated children ages six to 11 years watch an average of 24 hours of television per week. And the more they watch in their younger years the more likely they are to become overweight teenagers. Why? Because time spent watching TV increases between-meal snacking and is time not being spent on more physically active pursuits.

The researchers further point out the prevalence of obesity increased by two percent for each hour of TV viewed in the 12- to 17-year-olds. Only 10 percent of teenagers who watched an hour of TV a day are obese, for example, compared to 20 percent of teens who watch more than five hours a day.

The solution to this is obvious, reduce the amount of hours spent watching TV and to stop snacking in front of it. Simple. Or is it? **STRESS**
Children, like adults, experience stress in their

daily lives. Their stress focuses on divorce, peer conflict, school, sport, illnesses, etc. And eating, as many of my "portly" readers know, provides a moment of satisfaction and temporary solace. It appears that children, with their own particular set of problems, are discovering the temporary joys of munching also. Not all children are obese, true, but a significant number are and there is every indication they will become obese adults, which opens another Pandora's box.

We cannot eliminate the stress in our children's lives. We can, however, assist them in developing lifestyles that minimize the jarring effects of stress. Meals and snacks low in fat and sugar and high in fiber and complex carbohydrates should become standard fare in your homes. Some form of aerobic exercise should also be performed regularly. If the parents are eating properly and exercising regularly, then chances are the children are also. Hopefully, my words

didn't have a lasting effect on Carolyn's psyche. I have since regretted my response to her letter of interest. In retrospect, I don't blame Carolyn for having been obese but I do blame her parents. Are you doing what is physically and nutritionally sound for your children or will someone one day blame you?
Editor's Note: Ahmad Daniels provides private and group seminars on health issues.

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