

## Will Adolescence Become Interminable?

By JANNA MALAMUD SMITH

I DECIDED YEARS AGO THAT ADOLESCENCE IN THE United States ends at 32. Maybe 33. Thirty years from now, will the tipping point have ratcheted up to 50? It could happen.

For starters, parents' increasing longevity may take a further toll on children's maturation, as with those male apes that don't develop fully masculine features as long as more senior males dominate the pack. Keep the elderly fit, and the edgy but dependent 18-year-old may become the edgy but dependent 48-year-old still waxing his mohawk. It's already happening in Italy with *le mam-mone*, the grown sons who never, EVER leave home (though they sometimes rent studio apartments for entertaining girlfriends). Either the parents' hyperactivity keeps the *figli* from growing up, or the sons sacrifice their chance at self-sufficiency to keep mama or papa happy. Or, in light of the plunging birthrate, maybe long-suffering single children have to absorb parenting meant for six.

But the future length of adolescence also depends on what happens to childhood. Contemporary childhood pressures children intensely but seems to do little to make them feel ready for adulthood. No wonder adolescence protracts. Jerome Kagan, the Harvard University childhood researcher, has brilliantly suggested that the reason we must continually reassure our kids with love is that they're so useless for so long. For comparison, think about the indigenous four- or five-year-olds on a South Seas island capable of harvesting more protein for the family diet—by diving for crustaceans—than their parents can. These kids know their worth because they are contributing in a substantial way. They know how to become adults because they have spent childhood observing and excelling at the relevant skills. Dive into water. Retrieve clam. Repeat.

In the United States, the industrial revolution gradually split labor from home life. With more adult work in the office (and in the mind) and less in the home, kids stopped being able to closely observe their parents in

order to learn about their own route. The 20th century invented unending school as an alternative way to prepare them for their increasingly complex and abstract future labor. As one of our sons put it, "Remind me how calculus will help me cope later."

Meanwhile, psychologists defined childhood in the family as an idealized time of love and "development." But what constitutes the right love? Or the best development? Perplexed parents have responded to these nebulous questions by providing ever more tutors, soccer skills camps, and ballet lessons. They exhaust themselves carpooling kids ad nauseam and then try to convey love by cheering from the sidelines. Meanwhile, overpacked schedules and the focus on academic achievement guarantee that children have no opportunity to make real contributions to family survival or well-being. Most do no productive work. Instead, they endure a parasitism that is at once too driven, too deprived, and too indulged. No wonder they spend every free second in some virtual world—computer or television screens before them, iPods in their ears. If this trend continues, in 30 years adolescence may become an endpoint life goal for the lucky centenarian.

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## What's Next on the Menu?

By JAMES MORRIS

THE TEMPTATION FOUR OR FIVE DECADES AGO WAS TO read the future of food in the powdery crystals of Tang. Launched in 1957, the same year as Sputnik, the orange drink later accompanied pioneering astronauts into space. It needed no refrigerator's chill. It could be stored in a cupboard or a pocket. It had more vitamin C than orange juice (and today has vitamin A and iron too). It was ready when you and a glass of water were. Tang was the fuss-free harbinger of what food might be in the future, a necessity still but not a distraction. Progress would bring steak lozenges, flounder pills, and broccoli gum. In the meantime, there was Metrecal in 1960, a diet drink that gave you, in a can, the nour-



“Fresh pepper on that, sir?”

ishment of a meal. Quickly, too, because you didn't want to linger over getting it down or you might accidentally taste it.

And in all the food time you saved with powders and pills and elixirs, you'd write a symphony or invent a vaccine.

But austere Tang was not the future after all. Instead, the latter decades of the 20th century saw the rise in America of a cult of cuisine downright Petronian in its ritualistic excess. Yes, pleasure will out, always, sooner or later, in everything; there's no surprise in that. And no plastic packet microshocked back to life from its freeze-dried state (“Clear!”) yields the soulful aroma of a slow roast. But who could have predicted that so many chicken-on-Sunday/meatloaf-on-Wednesday/steak-for-special-occasions Americans would become preoccupied with food—its provenance, purchase, preparation, presentation, consumption, and contemplation? The preoccupation was induced not by famine or shortage, as sometimes happened in the past, but by plenty. The food fetish in America, like the fitness fetish, falls to the predictable side of the lines of class and material sufficiency that fissure the coun-

try. Worry about where your family's next week of meals is coming from, and you fret less about the alphabetical gaps in your herb bin.

Cookbooks, catalogs, specialty stores, TV shows, and entire weekly sections of newspapers are now devoted to an elaborate liturgy of food. What mind games did the sly French win to make otherwise-sensible Americans—your friends and neighbors, maybe members of your own family, all good people, really—say *sous-chef* and *saucière* and *digestif*? And furnish their kitchens with mighty stoves, refrigerators high and wide as townhouses, and an arsenal of pots, pans, and utensils, the depth and diameter of each pot, the pitch of the sides of each pan, calibrated precisely to its purpose—this for boiling, that for steaming, braise here, sauté there, and fry only in a trailer? Of course, the formidable gear is not necessarily for use. Like books, collections can be for display only, and periodic dusting.

For playing out the fantasies unfulfilled in home kitchens, there are restaurants, more of them than ever. They premiere as movies once premiered and are

reviewed, starred, and—what else?—panned. And they have a cultural range that suggests the UN is stirring the pots. The exotic cuisines of choice for most Americans used to be Chinese and French, pizza and wurst being too domesticated to count. But variety is now here to stay, because so many new citizens from abroad have brought with them their recipes. We eat the native foods of countries we couldn't locate on a map, and of countries that exist on no map but whose disparate cuisines some antic chef has thought to fuse: Chinese-Slovakian, Belgian-Inuit. In our food pantheon of Hindu profusion, chefs are the major deities. We watch as they rise and fall, are worshiped and flambéed. Some withdraw in creative exhaustion, only to return reheated and do something previously unthinkable to a sea urchin.

What's the future of American foodolatry? To Americans 30 years hence, will we seem daft or relatively innocent—or perhaps just plain lucky to have had the luxury of indulgence? For, of course, the spell can be broken, but by a cure worse than the affliction: bad times that clear the palate and the mind by returning the nation from plenty to want.

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## Is Peace Possible?

By STEPHEN M. YOUNGER

IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT WE WILL ESCAPE THE scourge of war within the next three decades, but as more and more countries acquire means of mass destruction, it is time to ask whether peace is even *possible*. Are we doomed by some biological or social imperative to continue the violence of our past, or is there hope that we might find a different path?

Even a tentative answer would have profound implications for how we craft international policy, but scholars seem polarized over the very origin of human violence. Some attribute it to a fundamental flaw in our nature, perhaps a holdover from our hunter past; others think that the problem lies in the social systems that govern group behavior. Research based on observations of diverse cultures is beginning to shed light on this critical issue.

Most societies are peaceful at least some of the time,

and a few seem to have found the secret of avoiding violence almost entirely. Societies on Pacific islands such as Pukapuka, Kapingamarangi, and Manihiki have survived for centuries with remarkably little violence. Murders are extraordinarily rare, and only the oldest oral traditions mention wars.

What do these peaceful societies have in common, and what lessons can we, in our complex world, learn from them? For one thing, all of them have populations of fewer than about a thousand people—the maximum-size group in which everyone can still know everyone else and have a direct say in how they live. Decisions are made by councils typically composed of male elders who are heads of families. Also, these societies are isolated enough from their neighbors that contact is at best infrequent. But regardless of size or isolation, peace isn't free. Group members must remain ever vigilant lest someone upset the social balance. Many small societies are ruthlessly intolerant of bad behavior, enforcing peace with ridicule and ostracism that sometimes continue for years after the transgression. In short, they work at maintaining the peace.

This is not to suggest that we all retreat to tropical islands. But the existence of these societies does demonstrate that human beings can live peacefully under the right conditions. Peace seems to hold when people have a say in how their group is governed and when every group member commits to following the rules and to sanctioning immediately those who do not. These are lessons that we can apply in the modern world.

As individuals, we tolerate bad behavior in others by maintaining that it is not our job to correct them. On a global scale, countries go to war and engage in genocide, and sometimes little is done to stop them. As difficult as it is to change our tendency not to act, the threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction make it urgently necessary that we do.

We are growing up as a global society, and it is time to accept our responsibilities as individuals and nations. If we are to reap the benefits of peace, we will need to invest time and energy to *make* it happen. The next 30 years may represent a watershed in human affairs, forcing us to come to terms with what we are, where we have come from, and, most important, where we want to go.

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