

JIM COTTER

AFTER THE GROUP: A DIALOGUE ON THE A1

Underdog: Well now, Topdog, it wasn't so bad, was it? Are you there Topdog, can you hear me? Are you listening?

Topdog: Yes, I'm listening, Underdog, but there's a lot of work to be done this week, you know.

Underdog: Ya, bugger work. Hear that, Topdog? Yippee for Underdog, marvellous Underdog. Yippee!

Topdog: Don't let things get out of hand. You're driving a car down the A1, you know.

Underdog: I know I'm driving my car down the bloody A1, and it's perfectly all right, 'cos I feel perfectly safe. There's hardly any bloody traffic on the road. One thing's just overtaken me, and what he's got his bloody lights on for, I don't know. He doesn't need 'em yet.

Topdog: As long as you can get off the road safely when you want to.

Underdog: I won't have you taking over again, Topdog. I'm not going to listen to you. I'm going to have a ball. I'm going to keep my foot on this accelerator if I want to. I'm just going to bomb right down the A1. Or right up it. Yuh, huh, right up the bloody arse of the A1.

Topdog: I made you feel guilty then, didn't I?

Underdog: Yes, Topdog, you did, just a little bit of a qualm, but not as much as usual, not so much as you usually make me.

Topdog: Ah, but there was a qualm there. I mean, a word like 'arse', and 'going up it', it's a bit near the bone you know.

Underdog: Shurrup, Topdog, shurrup. I might let you have your place when I know what it really is, but I'm going to bugger it and arse it as much as I like, and I'm going to enjoy it. You've had your say for far too long, Topdog. You've been around dominating me for far too

long. And it was a clever trick, trying to keep me isolated from the others in the group and feeling superior. Same old vicious circle. Never really meeting anyone this weekend. But it didn't entirely work, did it? You were breaking down, especially towards the end. Think I caught you on the hop when I wept a bit, Topdog. I know you wouldn't let me go completely, but I'm going to go there again. You let me off the leash, remember? You rather hoped I wouldn't go into that little copse in the park, but I did, and I've got to go and explore it again sometime. You tricked me when you let me off the leash at first, when you said, 'Look, there's this big park to explore.' I hadn't a clue where to go, where I wanted to go, and I couldn't even start until I saw that there were railings there, and those railings were the other folk in the group. So I knew that I wouldn't harm myself. But it was a long time before I knew where I wanted to explore. Then there were other bits and pieces in the park which rather took my fancy, which I wouldn't mind having a go at sometime. It'd be good to look at them and explore them. Especially that curvy, succulent patch of green. Yes, I had a bit of a nibble at that, didn't I, Topdog? Only a nibble I know, but it was quite pleasant. And that other patch where the grass was a bit longer: I'm not sure about that one. Bit frightened of it. Okay, I'll admit that I'm frightened, Topdog. I'm not going there yet, not yet, but I am going to. And then, right in the middle of that copse: that's somewhere else to go, where it's pretty dark and pretty nasty. I gave you a shock when I went to the edge of it. But I'm going to be back again. Well, I'm still alive, and I'm feeling a lot better, Topdog. I reckon the illness is going. I'm feeling more healed. But I needed to be ill to remind you that you have to be kept in your place, boy. You have to be kept in your place. Okay, Topdog, signing off for now: I suppose you're right. I can't keep on going along this bloody A1 all the way to Edinburgh.

Topdog: You know, Underdog, you didn't really do very much. Just think of all the bags of aggression and anger you didn't even begin

to express. I don't think you called anyone a bastard. Not quite sure that you even swore.

Underdog: Never you mind, Topdog, never you bloody mind. You know darned well that there wasn't that much energy in me because you've left me drained, because you haven't allowed

me a place, because you've forced me to try and breathe again. Of course I didn't do very much. But I started, and you didn't hoodwink me all the time. Soon you'll be back on the top again - but it won't be quite the same. I can pull down if I want to - and one of these days I just may want to again.

A NEW APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Wendi Love, an American psychologist who was a co-director of a psychological institute in California, has just published two books: one is on experimental work with handicapped children and the other is on child and parent relationships. However she is now concentrating all her time on children's education.

She has set up a six weeks summer camp programme in Malaga, Spain, under the name PHERIANATH, which she translates as 'the last island for children'.

The avowed aim of PHERIANATH is to help further the education of a humanistic society. They offer all normal holiday activities - riding, swimming, boating and hiking, but the particular emphasis will be on the exploration of individuality through creative arts and communication. The summer programme will be led by six humanistic psychologists, all artists in their own right. Work in the arts, music, drama, mime, painting, poetry and sculpture would not be aimed at accomplishment but rather at a sense of style, or presentation of self.

Communication entails the search for identity through answering in groups such questions as 'Tell me who you are,' or 'What is the purpose of life?' This is to develop the ability to express one's need and feelings directly without having to use 'games' as an indirect method of communication. They would also be using video-tape, film and recording, and each child would be expected to keep a journal of experiences and feelings. The last fortnight at the camp would be spent on survival exercises - learning the ingenuity of instinctive survival, but these last two weeks are optional to allow parents to spend some of the holiday time with their children. Camp dates are July 6th to August 24th, and the camp is limited to sixteen children between the ages of 9 and 15 years. Anyone needing more information about this scheme should write to: PHERIANATH Apdo.137, Estepona, Malaga, Spain.