

Letter to the Editor

Dear Vivian,

I was interested in the article by Barry Shenker on "Therapy as Sport" - chiefly the parts where "play" is indicated rather than sport in the spectator sense. Throughout my teaching life I was always amazed at the real "need" of children for play - in the classroom as well as outside it. This is not only as a means, as Pringle asserts, "for learning about and resolving complex and often conflicting emotions". but for the simple purpose of acting out relationships - king to subject, husband to wife, detective to criminal and so on - which are full of interest for those at the beginning of life. Thus, I feel, is not just because they have read stories involving them but

because growth and awareness in the human spirit takes place in response to such relationships, real or imagined.

I would go further and say that children who have had inadequate opportunities for dramatic "play" become delinquent and even criminal on that account. The human being seems to need to see himself/herself in relation to conflicts and their resolution and the earlier he/she had the opportunity to explore them the better social being he/she will become.

But I am probably stating what is already implied in the article, although it gives me some satisfaction to do even that.

Marion Alford
Bexhill on Sea

Anthony Penny

TALEPIECE

This story is a confluence of three streams; that stuck trouser zips can be freed with penetrating oil; that back pain can be relieved by getting blotto; and that there is a tenuous connection between Wandsworth and Dorset.

At the time I am writing about I had my worst back pain ever. I could hardly walk, even with a stick. I had to be driven to an early meeting of the AHP in Bayswater Road, when Esalen came to London, bringing greetings from Big Sur, where Henry Miller lived too. The hospitality was immense, and I warmed to it with great zest; so that, when the end came I had to be helped in a "there, there" sort of way. I was offered a lift very kindly by a

Headmaster from Abbotsbury in Dorset (where the dogs bear their masters' surnames, Rover Giles, for instance). I have only just found out ten years after, that it was David Boadella. Before leaving I went to the loo, my zip stuck in the bottom position, so that I had to walk out in a circumspect sort of way, saying good-byes in the way they have at Esalen. (I was not too worried about my zip, because I knew I could free it with penetrating oil when I got home).

The headmaster drove me southwards across the river, through Battersea, and half-way across Clapham Common by Nightingale Walk (Dr. Johnson must have come by here on his way to visit Mrs. Thrale in Streatham, before she married her Italian music master. (Thrale, a brewer, also had a gin distillery, in which an ancestor of mine had an interest. So, you see, my provenance has a glow to it).

I walked westwards along Nightingale Walk, down Nightingale Lane (where the only nightingale left is a Young's pub). I went on along the south side of Wandsworth Common, in the old manor of Allfarthing, once owned by the Earls Spencer, and still commemorated in the names of the roads nearby, Althorp, Wiseton, and Nottingham. Thomas Hardy lived, in London, on the corner of Nottingham Road, and Lloyd George just opposite.

You will notice that I have forgotten all about my back pain. I had telephoned home for a lift from the top of Nightingale Lane, but they did not sound too keen at two o'clock in the morning. I was walking like a youngster, and bleep them if they did not want to fetch me. I crossed the road at the lights by the Surrey Tavern, and walked down Burntwood Lane, with the old Magdalen College estate on my right, and reached my road which runs between the mental hospital and the cemetery, just down the hill from Wandsworth Prison (therapists working in NW3, 6 or 8 do not realize what south-west London has to offer.

Then I arrived home and rang the bell with a long demanding peal. I could not have been fully sober yet, because my back had not begun to hurt again. My wife came to the window, and I called out for all the neighbours to hear "My zip has stuck. Can you find the penetrating oil"?

There is not much more to say, except to ask for your humanist tolerance, and to warn you that penetrating oil must be used very sparingly.