

In Real Life

FIRST-PERSON AMERICA

KIDS NEED MORE "NO'S" AND MORE THROWS

By Suzy Ryan

SAN DIEGO—It was an offer I couldn't refuse. Who wouldn't want to teach at the same school their children attend?

A few months into the experience, however, I became disillusioned with how America is raising its youth. During my time in the classroom I have observed absolutely blatant disrespect for authority. When I was young, we would never have treated grownups as children do today. What ever happened to reverence toward adults and their mandates?

My school-earned disillusionment was powerfully reinforced on the morning when I discovered that someone had broken into my garage, ransacked my car, found my purse, and stolen my wallet (yes, with ID, credit cards, checks, cash, and family pictures). It must have been someone young, since he'd crawled through a small doggie door. And this young someone was out very late, since I hadn't gone to bed until 1:00 a.m. that night.

Stunned, I stared at my violated purse and struggled not to develop a victim mentality. As I slowly remembered all the items it had contained, I got angry. I couldn't stop thinking about my missing watch, cross necklace, prescription glasses, and wallet. I especially mourned for my Oakley sunglasses, not because they are expensive but because they were my mother's last gift to me, and can never be replaced.

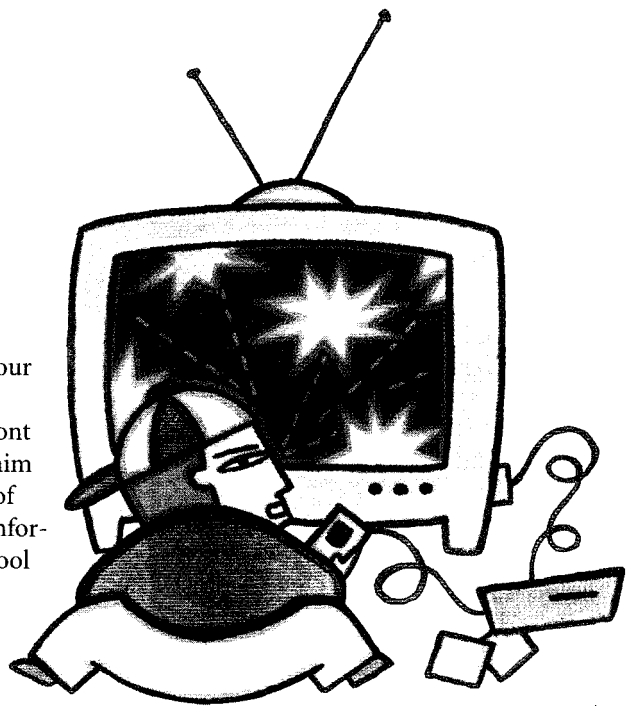
After we made out the police report and put motion detector lights and a security system in our home, I donned my "Nancy Drew" hat and started investigating. Going door to door, I discovered there had been numerous car break-ins nearby, where a group of kids hangs out until late. One young man even gave me the name of a student who

was bragging about stealing in our area. I found his address in the phonebook and ached to confront the guy. I wanted to discipline him for his poor behavior. But fear of retaliation made me leave the information with the police and school officials instead. The events in Littleton have forced society to deal differently with children.

As I continued teaching, I could see a clear connection between the blatant disrespect among young people that I've observed at my new job and the child breaking into my garage. Some kids today demonstrate a chilling indifference to the consequences of their behaviors. And I've been thinking a lot about the sources of this.

I don't want to judge parents, because I make mistakes every day with my own children. But if for one afternoon I could arrange to fill my classroom with parents instead of children, this would be my assignment to those grownups:

1. Lose the Nintendo and limit TV and computer time. Kids today have a short attention span because they are constantly stimulated and have no idea how to entertain themselves.
2. Give children guidelines and expect first-time obedience. They should not be out late. You are responsible for knowing where they are and what they are doing.
3. Less material stuff is more. Make them earn their windfalls by working. Don't indulge them with gifts they do not deserve just because you feel guilty you aren't spending enough time with them. This spawns ungrateful kids.
4. Make discipline count. Take away privileges that hurt (a birthday party, a field trip, a baseball game). Draw a line against disrespect and follow through.
5. Do not flatter children with false praise, but sincerely compliment them.



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Our offspring are smarter than you think, and they know their strengths and their weaknesses.

6. Finally, spend time together. When was the last time you threw a football, rode bikes, played Legos, or colored a picture with your children? Know what they like and who their friends are. Treat them with a sense of worth and model self-control. Kids learn by watching, and they will emulate you.

Come on, parents! Give teachers something to work with, and don't expect them to do your job too. Let's love children enough to train them in the real consequences of their actions. Let's teach them respect, and that they are responsible for their behavior.

And let's make it an offer they cannot refuse.

Suzy Ryan has contributed several articles to The American Enterprise.



Clinton-Gore Swamp Fever

By Brian Doherty

The biggest, most complicated environmental public works project ever attempted by the U.S. government might just sink without a trace into south Florida's fabled Everglades.

The project, officially the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and known as the "Re-Study," is colloquially called a "restoration." But the Army Corps of Engineers' planned \$7.8 billion, 30-year-plus project is just another human rejiggering of the awesome expanse of slow-flowing water, cypress tree stands, sawgrass, alligators, and wading birds known in the old days as the "River of Grass."

The Everglades were once an almost solid sheet of water and sawgrass flowing dreamily south from Lake Okeechobee down to the Florida Bay. The area has fallen on hard times in the past few decades—the direct result of the last time the Corps chose to treat it as a Tinker Toy set. The swamp is now about half the size it used to be, and the 'Glades have suffered huge soil loss; contamination by mercury, pesticides, and phosphorus; encroachment of non-native exotic plants; and dramatic declines in native fish and wildlife.

The Corps' plan seemed to make sense at the time. After Florida suffered decades of regular destructive flooding in the first half of the century, the Corps launched its 1948 Central and Southern Florida Project. The project built 1,720 miles of canals and levees, 150 gates and spillways, and 16 pumping stations. It also turned 1,100 square miles of swamp just south of Okeechobee into rich agricultural land, now known as the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA).

The EAA is now home to sugar farmers, whose phosphorus-laden runoff is

changing the traditionally nutrient-poor Everglades from a sawgrass wonderland to a tangle of cat tails.

Why ought American taxpayers, at great expense, favor the more traditional sawgrass over the new cattails? The restoration debate is dominated by the urge to restore the "natural" state of the Everglades. But the Corps' latest plan isn't, and can't be, a return to some static "natural" Everglades. Such a thing never existed in the violent and storm-prone world of southern Florida, barely above sea level. And even if it had, we don't know enough about it to "restore" it.

The Corps' new work will just be another human re-engineering, reflecting current human wants. And interviews with the likes of Everglades National Park Superintendent Richard Ring hint at what those wants are. He tells me one of the "three main goals" of the south Florida ecosystem effort is to "rethink urban developed areas.... We need to get smarter about building quality environments. That means getting out of cars, using mass transit, designing more quality communities not dependent on autos."

Any process involving so much money and so many different interests—13 federal agencies, seven Florida agencies and commissions, two American Indian tribes, 16 counties, lots of municipalities, and the usual gaggle of interested environmentalist groups—inevitably creates conflicts. Some of these conflicts were on display during a South Florida Restoration Science Forum conference held in Boca Raton last May which aimed to unify the interests and perspectives of scientists and government managers on the Everglades.

The dozens of science-fair-like table displays filling the hotel told not only of troubles with water flows but also invasions by "exotic" non-native plant species (a sort of floral ethnic cleansing), phosphorus and mercury contamination, and 68 endangered species (the federal Department of the Interior is simultaneously pursuing a comprehensive multispecies recovery plan for the Everglades, another complicated scheme meant to dovetail with the Re-Study).

Some of the problems are interconnected in complicated ways; some are difficult to solve simultaneously. One mercury scientist tells me of apparent relationships between decreasing phosphorus and increasing mercury. The needs of one endangered species don't necessarily dovetail with another. For example, the Everglades National Park, in an attempt to get water levels right for the needs of a population of the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow subspecies, has, according to the Miccosukee Tribes who live there, caused ecological disaster in the non-federal Everglades lands to the north of the park. The Park Service's insistence on keeping water dammed up to their north drowned 85 percent of the deer population in 1994-95; it is also killing many of the distinctive tree islands vital to Miccosukee tribal ritual, and is even flooding the habitat of two other endangered Everglades birds.

The park is dedicated to "saving less than half of the Everglades at the expense of the remaining majority of the Everglades," says Dexter Lehtinen, the tribes' lawyer. "If they don't own it, then it's not Everglades as far as they're concerned."

For now, "getting the water right" is the overriding mantra of the restoration attempt: increasing the flow of water