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with her daddy, Arthur T. Rivers, thirty-nine; her mommy, Frances L. Rivers, thirty-four; her brother Steven, eight; Grandma Mary Lockridge, seventy; and Jane Williamson, described as a sixty-three-year-old divorced boarder.

It doesn't sound like a very peaceful household, and I imagine that Art Rivers has his hands full when his mother-in-law and cantankerous Jane get to drinking and hollering and throwing lamps at each other.

But that's not what bothers me; it's little Patty, whose age is listed on the form as "0." Now we know that Patty can't possibly be zero. From the moment of birth everybody has some age, be it seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, or years. As a matter of fact, it says that Patty was born in August 1969. (It also notes that she was "never married," which figures.) Patty isn't one year old yet, to be sure. But she certainly isn't zero. Anybody with an eight-month-old baby girl in the house knows that "0" is just plain ridiculous.

I think Art Rivers was wrong, and did his youngest child an injustice, when he wrote zero. Maybe he really



meant to put "7½ months" but was distracted by Mary's throwing Jane down the cellar stairs. With those two around, a man can't even think.

—DERECK WILLIAMSON.

### Poem

This has no meaning  
and no being.  
It is not a poem.  
It has no meter  
to speak of, no form;  
no overflow, no *Angst*,  
no wisdom, power,  
tension, image, rhyme;.

an empty drawer  
(one poor metaphor)

It has no myth,  
no archetypal pull,  
defaults on diction,  
and says no more  
than prose could say  
much better. For once  
I know for sure:  
here are some words  
that do not form a poem.  
What luxury, what ease;  
I won't revise a word.  
No pain, no pang,  
no poem. Now,  
what shall I call it?

—ALAN VAN DINE.



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# Top of My Head

Goodman Ace

## Speak Softly and Carry a Big Ax Handle

HEAVEN KNOWS I've been trying for a year and three months to follow the admonition of our President to speak softly. It should have been easy. All it requires is to make sure, when you discuss politics, that the other man is on your side. But we live in a climate of fear, and you can't tell the players without—excuse it—a scare card.

It's the fashion, these days of the newly formed Silent Majority, for all citizens to be "aware." But everyone you talk to is tensely wary of your particular awareness. So tense, any innocuous conversation can raise the intensity of the sound level by several decibels.

"How are you?" can often lead to a feverish argument about Medicare.

"Nice weather, isn't it?" will bring on an asthmatic debate on the causes of pollution.

"My regards to your family," can lead to an explosive conversation about overpopulation.

"Where's your son these days?" and you're suddenly talking about Vietnam and the relative merits of life in Sweden or Canada.

No topic is sacrosanct. Recently at a lunch with a guy, I was going on at some length about a daring social reform—something like they should never abolish hot lunches for school children. Although I spoke softly, my companion had become agitated.

"Who said they're going to abolish hot lunches?" he asked.

"I read it in the morning paper."

"Newspapers," he scoffed. "I don't believe what I see in the papers. I have to see it in black and white."

As I wondered in what color he thought my paper was printed, he leaned close and whispered hoarsely, "You know what I think you are?"

"No. What do you think I am?"

He looked furtively over his shoulder. He was going to spare me a public defamation. "You're a liberal," he hissed.

I paled visibly. Here I had gone and taken sides again. No matter how much

I had lowered my voice, I was being labeled and libeled. No matter how painfully I try to straddle fences, I always get it where it hurts most.

I even type softly. Yet, there's always some reader with an alert inner ear that picks up the sound of my trousers ripping as I try typographically to climb a fence. Like this out-of-towner who wrote at some length to straighten out my thinking on some controversial political figure. As I read his letter, I found myself vacillating.

I can vacillate as easily as the next man. Vacillation is the order of the day. Vacillation goes hand in hand with lowering our voices. Even the top man in our government, Vice President Agnew, vacillated recently as he spoke, in modulated voice, though sharply, against the men with ax handles who attacked a bus carrying children to school. That was down in Thurmond country, where the government's voice has often been softly conciliatory, in tune with Southern strategy.

And so I vacillated as I read this letter. The writer had almost convinced me until I read his final paragraph: "Why don't you stop running with that Madison Avenue pack and learn to think for yourself?"

Then I realized he was asking me to think not for myself, but for *himself*. Now, I defend the right of the Silent Majority to write from the heartland of America, where our President says they reside. I can vouch they do, and that they have too often been silent. Two sisters who live in Oklahoma and Missouri haven't sent me a birthday card in years.

As I read the morning paper, teetering on my fence, I came across an Associated Press dispatch from Portland, Oregon. There had been some shoplifting in the Reed College Bookshop. The owner put up a sign asking customers to remove their coats. One day, in walked eight students, six boys and two girls, removed all their clothing, and walked nude through the shop.

Well, although my lapels are narrow and my ties are narrow, my mind is wide open on the revolt of the student body. But I just couldn't dig the symbolism of this body demonstration. The significance seems also to have escaped the other students in the shop, who, the story reports, "pretty much ignored those in the buff." I can understand why they didn't lift their eyes from the books they were browsing, considering what's in books these days.

You will notice, I hope, that I'm still speaking softly, although there are days when I wonder: If we are to continue lowering our voices, shouldn't someone, somehow, somewhere along the line, be doing something about raising our goals?

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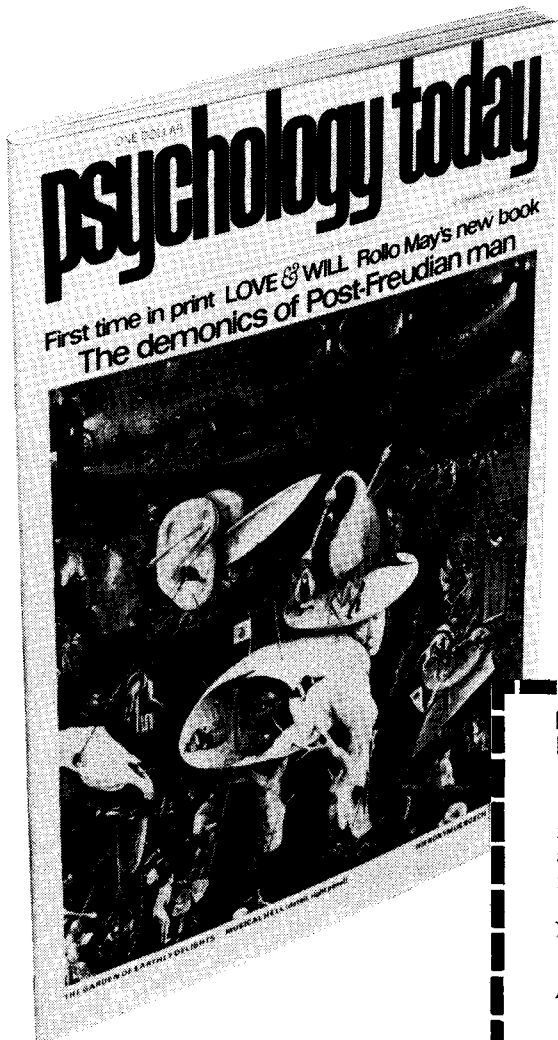
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By the author of *Taste in America*

THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY  
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## Trade Winds

Cleveland Amory

We've always thought that one of the types we could most easily do without these days is the type who puts a "g" in the word luxury. You know—that bird who tells you, in those TV ads, that a certain car is the last word in "lugsury." And the worst of it is, it's *all* the models, too—not just the delugs. In any case, we now know, via Sally Jones of San Antonio, Texas, that there are worse types. For Miss Jones unearthed the following clipping, complete with headline, from the San Antonio *Express*:

### SO WOULD

#### THE GENTILES

As the hearing in 57th District Court concerning obscenity at a local bookstore unfolded, Assistant Dist. Atty. John Quinlan was busily engaged asking questions of a vice bureau detective.

Suddenly Judge Franklin Spears halted the proceedings and stated: "Mr. Quinlan, if you wouldn't refer to genitals as gentiles, I would appreciate it."

Our Advertisement of the Fortnight also contained a stern typo. Bernard Witlieb of New York located it in the "New Arrivals" list from Barnes & Noble:

#### THE STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGES OF THE PRESIDENTS: 1790-1966.

The State of the Union messages tell dramatically the tribulations of a growing nation. Compiled and indexed for the first time, these documents present a weeping view of American history.

If there's one thing we look for in a history book, it's the broad weep. In any case, more than one correspondent culled one particular typo from the New York *Post*. Mary Roche of the Bronx sent it first:

Moscow (AP)—A top Soviet scientist not only approves of computer dating, he believes it "expedient to use computers to help people choose a souse."

Expedient, perhaps, but we'd hate to compute the data by data expense. As for the Classified Story of the Fortnight, it was unclassified by James Crombie of Sarasota, Florida, in a paper called *The Islander*:

**FOR SALE:** Stainless steel clam cooker, capacity 35 people.

You could probably get away with it, too, provided everybody *else* on the pic-

nic clammed up. Meanwhile, in honor of tax month, we commend *Atlas* magazine for uncovering April's most unusual tax story. It seems a Swedish countess by the name of Cecilia Lewenhaupt, living in a 106-year-old mansion, found the upkeep, expenses, and taxes were just too much. Apparently no one would take it off her hands—even as a gift. So what did she do? She blew it up—with dynamite.

**Out in Tucson, Arizona**, at the Nucleus Club, we found rancher Frank Appleton, who recently turned his 8,000-acre spread into a research ranch for environmental and extinct species studies, very concerned about another issue—the lowering of the voting age. "I think," he told us, "they ought to lower it at both ends. Why should you retire a fellow from General Motors, say, at sixty-five—and then let some ninety-year-old nut go on voting? Or, for that matter, go on chairmaning some Congressional committee?" We had no answer, save stern agreement. "After all," Appleton concluded, "what's good for General Motors ought to be good for something else."

**In honor** of the baseball season, we liked best a brief index item on the front page of the San Francisco *Chronicle*:

#### SPORTS

Hal Lanier hit a grand slam homer as the Giants walloped the Athletics, 14-14, in an exhibition game.

A close rout, all right. But we ourselves were present at one real wallop or rout—when the New York Rangers, facing hockey play-off extinction, not only had to defeat the Detroit Red Wings in the final game, but also had to score as many goals more than five as possible. This was because the Montreal Canadiens, who also had to lose to the Chicago Black Hawks in their last game for the Rangers to make the playoffs, would have qualified instead had they scored more than five goals, even in losing. Because, with two teams tied, the team scoring most goals gets into the play-offs. Have you got it? Well, we knew you wouldn't. But never mind. The point is the Rangers won 9 to 5, meaning that Montreal had to score five goals to beat them (four wouldn't do it because, if both teams have the same number of goals scored, then goals against—well, never mind). Anyway, as we were saying, first the Rang-