

Loneliness . . .

DAD THE FARMER was home. Dad the engineer is not. The 1870 widow had her children. The 1970 widow has photographs and plane tickets.

The 20th-century population increase and the resulting mechanical and economic revolutions are causing difficulties other than statistical. Difficulties often detrimental to the human mind. Ambiguous, uncomfortable, poignant difficulties. Subtle, local, personal difficulties.

It is not sufficient to fear famine and epidemic. The peril is much more immediate. The very core of human psychology is threatened with a suicidal invasion of privacy when one desires privacy and with a pitiless rejection of personal sharing when one wishes to share. Man is at the mercy of men—of men mercilessly competing, wishing to love, finding it more and more difficult to love.

Everyone shouts "The Pill!" but no one asks "Why?" Why does not man study causes instead of superficial means to alleviate? He likes simple answers—that's why. Abortion: much simpler than vast social innovations aimed at alleviation of illegitimacy or vast medical research programs aimed at alleviation of fetal disorders. Contraception: much simpler for alleviating pollution than alleviation of polluters.

Case Histories of Some Survivors

But meanwhile, even with a pill, many pills, the masses distend. Walls are erected. Mistrust. Survival of those most "fit" to survive.

Survival in loneliness.

Loneliness in the crowd.

Where Did Harry Go?

Perhaps it's the widow on the third floor. Her Harry died in his sleep four years ago. She's 54. Three children, all away. Too far. Come home every month. But then leave again. Four grandchildren. She glances at their pictures on top of the refrigerator. Can't look too long: hurts. She went to son's house last week. Afraid to disturb: son moonlights, must compete. Came back happy but sorry. Sad. Phone call. It helps. But must read evening paper, Sunday paper, church bulletin, last week's letter. Must read. Must be occupied. Reviews picture album. There's nothing more cruel than a picture album.

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TV? O.K. But too many family shows. Pseudofamily shows. Misses Harry. Can he see her? She must believe he can. Must. He mustn't be gone completely. She finds February too long. Can't go at will. Snow. It's dirty. Too many cars. Where are they all going? Why the rush, the constant rush? Can't they enjoy home and the kids? Life too fast; then too slow. Too painfully slow.

Lock the Chapel Doors

Perhaps it's a priest left to guard the campus. Guard against what, one wonders. All are home. Drinking vodka and singing "Silent Night." Two weeks alone. Midnight mass is quiet; only two other priests stayed. Telephone operator also. He reads. But can't concentrate. It's tough to read when one is

in the Crowd

PAUL R. GASTONGUAY

lonely. Looks out his one window. Snow is clean; he notices. But no footprints. No voices. Glances at man going to chapel to pray. Doors are locked: kids stole. Used to leave doors open. Prays, but can't concentrate. He goes to town. But alone. Everyone is gay. Buys. Spends. Charges. Laughs. Should he have married? Would now be with family if he had. But not his vocation, he says. Will talk again when sophomores return. Will be happy again. Thank God loneliness is temporary. Sometimes.

Never before so many people. Never before so few people.

Career Girl

Perhaps it's the college graduate. Last week she knew the end was coming. Returned cap and gown yesterday. Talked with the dean. Friendly woman, the dean. Blasted her; now will miss her. Will miss her dorm mates. All seemed so endless. Now the end. Very empty feeling. Start all over. She'll write to Julie tomorrow. How is Julie? Must be happy; will marry next week. So anxious to see her again. Knows she won't. Lives too far. But must find a job. A job. Competition. No job. Friends. New friends.



It's tough to make new friends. People are so cold. Can't they see she's lonely? Some see, but most don't care. Too busy. Too fast. Hurry.

Dishes in the Sink

Perhaps it's the baby-sitting husband. Wife off for a three-day break with Mom. Housewife syndrome. Captured by voracious walls. Must get away from the kids. Will love them more after. Hubby finds dish-washing gruesome. Tried to leave them a while. But can't stand the mess. First day is rainy. House very empty after trip to bus depot. Neighbors never speak. Heart empty. Can't explain the feeling. Took wife for

granted. As all husbands do. Took life for granted. When wife had bad day (kids, reproductive cycle, neighbors, rain), husband chuckled; or felt frustrated. Now sympathizes. Can't read. Can't eat too well. Forces kids to eat. House so different. Why is it? Golly, you don't know what you have until it's gone. Three days. Eternity. Why is it still raining? TV must be on; other voices erase loneliness. No. But a help. When kids in bed, house emptier. He looks out window. How can women stay at home so much, he wonders. Empty lives. Can one learn to accept loneliness? Or does one erase it? Can one become unlonely? One does what one has to do. Tough to try. The gutters spit out a constant stream of

water. Lonely sounds. But at least a sound. Bell rings. But only the paperboy, who waits for tip; must compete. Turn off lights. Leave hall light on. Two days left.

Hello There, Kiddies!

Perhaps it's a three-year-old after her sister has left for school one morning. She begins by screaming. A scream as when she falls. Yet deeper. More sincere. No one listening (or so she's made to believe), so she watches "Captain Kangaroo." It's raining outside. Then she forgets. Is happy again. At least appears so. Should one watching be sorry for her? No friends. Sister gone. Daddy earning money. 12-hour day. Must compete. Overtime will pay for second car. Missed Halloween this year. Mom afraid of doped candy and razor blades. Should one cry for her? But she seems happy. Let's hope she is. Give her an apple. She smiles. Wishes she could run through Grandma's garden. Hates to live on 12th floor.

Sheltered in Selfishness

Expanding populations become selfish populations. Why so selfish? Why do we see loneliness in those we love, yet do nothing? Nothing. Except when we're ready. If such is now a necessity for survival, pity this world. Decision is ours. When we're ready. Parents love, work, pay, feed. Children leave. College. Husband. Trip to Europe. Remember when all went camping together?

Cities become cold. Buildings become cold. People become cold. Numbers become so large that men become islands floating in seas of emptiness. Charity? Gone. Apartments are islands. Desks are islands. Subway seats are islands. No one talks to anyone. Smile and you look suspicious. Talk and you're fresh. Up to something. Meddling.

Egos stagnating in selfless bodies. Love by reflex. Everyone for himself. Money. Hurry. Fight.

Never before more money, more gadgets, more cars. More vacations. Never before more education, more time, time, time. But no time. Never before such loneliness.

The child, the priest, the widow; a new town, an empty house. Faces on the street. But new faces. New faces can be cruel. So many faces. Chemistry devoid of personality. City faces; city trees; city corners. All the same. Passive. There, but not there.

Now, Loneliness Pollution

Air pollution. Water pollution. Noise pollution. Too much. Too much. Too much. Now, loneliness pollution. Everyone alone. Dance alone, eat alone, ride alone, read alone. Bank alone.

Cry alone.

TV faces. Eyes, nose, wrinkles, and pimples. On-off switch of 23-inch personality. Sit and listen. Es-

cape. But not really faces. Electrons. Beams of electrons impersonating people. There, but not there. A fraud. No friend. Newspaper words. Not words: ink; just ink. Telephone the doctor and you get a recording. Telephone recordings: time; weather. No operator; no friend. Just plastic. Is plastic mechanizing mankind?

Grandma and her six lived two miles from neighbors. Five miles from town. No car. Little money. But happy. Very happy. Not pseudohappy. No TV; instead, real talk. Charity. Love, love, love. Now 100 faces piled in same space. New apartment building. No one knows guy next door. Car. TV. Money. TV meals. Thermostat. Wood stove gone. Body work gone; now head work. Is muscle evolving out of mankind? Out by 8, in by 6. Out by 7, in by 11. Gone weekends. Where? Nowhere. Just gone.

Investments. Principal. Interest. Dividends. Insurance. Wall Street becoming a universal friend. Homogeneous friend. Shared by all, known by none. Compute your 5½%. Deductions. List price. Retail value. Love becomes a credit card.

Everyone forgets the priest, the nun, the widow. No time. Too busy winding the seconds. Charity begins at home. Stays there. Love mom, go twice a year. Thankful for priest, old nun, former teacher; but send Christmas card. Not signed. Name printed. Ease conscience by adding photo. Send flowers after death. Praise and love after they're gone. Ease conscience. Pay for masses.

And 50 years of metabolism add up to what? To emotions inundated in powdered aspirin. To tears shielded by stock certificates. Love becomes lover; husband becomes corporate partner; child becomes tax deduction; mother becomes tax burden. Revenue at 5½% compounded quarterly. Children at what percent? Poor investment.

Computerized loneliness, programmed personality.

And So, Departing . . .

But suddenly time is all gone. Pain. Frightening, terrible pain. Fists redden. Teeth pound. Shoulders wince in unbearable hurt. 50 years flash in seconds. Fear. Terrible fear. Repentance. Hope. False hope. Breathing forced, skin turning blue. Pain going, leaving calmly; sunlight grays; eyes turn, turn, turn. Skinned protoplasm scatters. Too many people. Too much money. Too little money. Money, money, money. No escape. No outlet. No freedom. Now complete freedom. Excruciating pain, eternal hammers pounding on crushed ribs, all gone. Calm.

Eyes close. Chest is still, nails no longer grow, face is stuffed. Mahogany walls surrounded by dirt and stones. Decay.

Time all gone. No more laughing. No more love, life, appreciation. Never any talk, smile, dance. Stars, children, flowers. All gone. Always gone. Too fast. Hurry. Invest. Count. Rush for dirt and stones. Cold. So very cold. Lonely. Too Late.

Will get flowers.