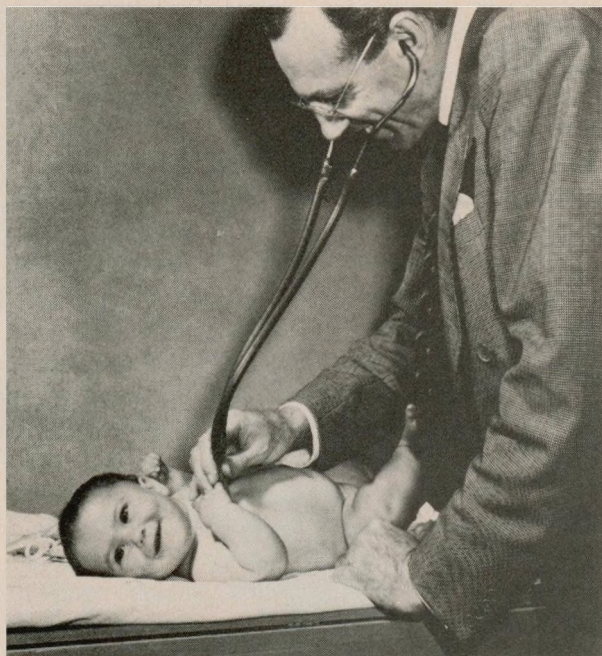


■ Contending that “You know more than you think you do,” Dr. Benjamin Spock reassured neophyte mothers and at the same time ushered in an era of practical, common-sense advice for parents, encouraging them to ignore the harsh behaviorist dicta found in other child-rearing manuals and instead trust their feelings and instincts. ■ With a background in pediatrics and psychiatry, Spock saw the child as an individual, with inborn traits that made each distinctive, and he humanized that which other child-care experts had made statistical, clinical. “Don’t be afraid to love your baby. . . . Every baby needs to be smiled at, talked to, played with, fondled—gently and lovingly.” But he also cautioned against over-permissiveness, stating that parents have a right to politeness and respect from their children, and all children need firm parental standards to relate to. He noted that “The spoiled child is not a happy creature even in his own home.”

■ **YOUTH.** Benjamin McLane Spock was born on May 2,

Champion of Children





Eminent pediatrician, Dr. Spock, above, examines Catherine Bateson, daughter of the great anthropologist Margaret Mead. Political activist, he marches in a 1967 demonstration in Chicago protesting the Vietnam War, below. Another leader of the march is Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., third from right.

1903, in New Haven, Connecticut, the eldest of six children of Benjamin Ives Spock, a corporation lawyer who was general counsel for the New Haven Railroad, and Mildred Stoughton Spock. His parents were loving but strict and imposed a firm puritanical code of conduct.

Ben's father assigned chores to all the children at an early age. His mother devoted almost all her time to seeing that the children grew up to be wholesome and responsible; she was convinced that sex was sinful, short hair provocative, lipstick anathema. Socialization was restricted, life spartan. The family slept year round in an unheated canvas tent erected on the roof of the front porch, where the chamber pot iced over in winter. The children were vegetarians until age 12, subsisting mainly on milk, stewed fruit, oatmeal, and eggs. This had no apparent effect on Ben's development; he grew to be six feet, four inches tall.

The boy was finally permitted to eat meat when he went to Hamden Hall, a country day school. Ben was happy there, played the bugle, won prizes for English composition and drawing, a cup for athletic excellence. He attended Phillips Academy, a prestigious preparatory school, partly because his mother felt the all-male setting was proper. At the Academy he excelled in the high jump, sang in the glee club,



and was graduated with high marks in the sciences and humanities.

MEDICINE. At Yale University Spock rowed on the crew that won a gold medal in the 1929 Olympic Games; he was singled out as the best individual performer, stroking with smoothness and accuracy. He thought of becoming an architect, but at a summer camp for crippled children he became aware of how much an orthopedic surgeon was helping the youngsters; he took courses in chemistry and entered Yale Medical School. Spock's mother still held a tight rein; when he accepted a summer job as a tutor-companion in fashionable Southampton, she was outraged and shamed him into joining a railroad section gang in Canada, where he did manual labor 10 hours a day and taught English to immigrants at night.

At the end of his second year Spock met Jane Davenport Cheney at a dance. She taught him to waltz, he was enchanted. Jane, having completed two years at Bryn Mawr, was respectable and wholesome, although not by Mrs. Spock's standards, for she wore sheer stockings and used lipstick; nevertheless, they were married four years later.

After two years at Yale Spock transferred to the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and took his M.D. degree in 1929, first in his class, and began a two-year internship at Presbyterian Hospital, where Jane was working on a research project. The young couple lived in Greenwich Village, found time for a lively social life, sailed a small boat in the summer, and were indefatigable dancers. The frenetic pace may have contributed to some physical problems: Jane's first child was born prematurely, lived just a day; Spock developed a "spontaneous pneumothorax," in those days this condition considered to be pneumonia, and he was bedridden for two months.

During a one-year pediatric residence at Cornell's New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, Spock saw a variety of illnesses that were common before the advent of antibiotics, immunization, and the required pasteurization of milk: mastoiditis, poliomyelitis, pneumonia. He also took a year's residency in psychiatry and in his spare time trained for six years at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, determined to apply the principles of psychiatry and psychoanalysis to pediatrics, striving to prevent problems rather than having to treat them later.

In 1933, the year that his first son, Michael, was born, Spock entered private practice. He favored new approaches and liberal ideas in child rearing, encouraged breast feeding, unpopular at the time, feeding on demand, even the use of the pacifier. He insisted on taking time to discuss psychological prob-

lems in depth, made house calls so that he could see the child in his environment.

Spock's booming laugh and relaxed manner cheered parents as well as children. "One of my faults as a pediatrician," he wrote later, "has always been that I whoop it up too much with children." His waiting room overflowed with toys, and he had built a gadget so that the child had to climb a short flight of stairs and go through a trap door to reach the examining table. During these years he also taught pediatrics at Cornell, was assistant attendant pediatrician at New York Hospital, and consultant to the New York City Department of Health. Exposure to the newest theories in elementary education came with his appointment as physician for the Brearley School.

Spock served as resident summer physician for the Adirondack League Club in upstate New York beginning in 1936, and it was in this bucolic setting that he began to write *Baby and Child Care* in



*He and his wife Jane visit two of their grandchildren. He dedicated his book, *Child and Baby Care*, to her.*

response to an offer by Pocket Books, a pioneer in paperback publishing. The financial inducement was meager, but Spock wanted to write a child-rearing guide that would combine sound pediatrics with sound psychology with the goal of increasing the self-confidence of parents and thus benefit the children. "I wanted to be supportive of parents rather than to scold them," he wrote later.

NAVY. Spock volunteered for military service when the United States entered World War II but was rejected because of lung trouble and intermittent back strain. By the spring of 1944 the war had

escalated and Spock answered a new call for physicians. He received his commission as lieutenant commander in the Navy in March, 1944, a month before the birth of his second son, John. He was classified as a psychiatrist, which were more in demand than pediatricians, and assigned to the Naval Hospital at St. Albans. The case histories of most



of the patients in the psychopathic ward, he wrote, "were an emphatic education in what emotional neglect of children can do."

In his free time he continued work on the book. The writing went well; Spock says he was always able to write with a certain fluency, in part because his mother insisted on two detailed letters a week when the children were away from home. By 1945 he was able to show the oft-revised manuscript to medical specialists, educators, and parents, and when, in September, Spock and his base hospital unit were ordered to San Bruno, California, he spent the seven days traveling across the continent in indexing the book. From California he would call his wife daily, sometimes in the middle of the night, with changes in the galley proofs, and Jane would take the changes to the publisher. Shortly he was transferred to the Naval Air Station in San Diego and put in charge of pediatrics at the Family Hospital and Clinic, where he remained until his discharge in May, 1946, just in time to celebrate the appearance of *Baby and Child Care*.

BABY BOOK. Published simultaneously in hard cover and paperback, the book within 10 months had sold well over a half-million copies. Written in an easy, informal style, *Baby and Child Care* became the vade mecum for two generations of American

parents, the all-time best seller after the Bible, and has been published in 29 languages; the author became the country's best-known pediatrician. But the reassuring tone was misinterpreted by some as over-permissiveness, although Spock could point to such clearly explicit phrases as: "You can be both friendly and firm," and "When there is a temper tantrum you certainly don't give in meekly and let the child have his way."

In the first revision, in 1954, the author put even more emphasis on the rights of parents and his conviction that firmness made not only for better-behaved but for happier children. Spock apologized in the second revision, 1968, for calling all babies "he," but continued to do so to avoid the clumsiness of two pronouns. This brought him into head-on conflict with the burgeoning women's liberation movement, whose members saw him as a male chauvinist on a par with Sigmund Freud. The third revision, in 1976, saw changes to eliminate the "sexist biases... that help to create and perpetuate discrimination against girls and women" and put much more emphasis on fathering.

ACADEMIA. After the war Spock returned to private practice, but he was not altogether happy. The pace was strenuous and left little time for the kind of research and writing that interested him, and when he was offered an appointment to teach child psychiatry at the Mayo Clinic in 1947 he accepted.

In his lectures Spock emphasized the integration of psychiatric and pediatric ideas, and he also became absorbed in the Rochester Health Project, assembling a staff that investigated the optimum physical and emotional preventive care for children. The following year he began a project called "The Inborn Temperament Study" that examined the inherent traits of infants in order to understand better their later personality development. The results were disappointing and the study eventually ended, although Spock retained his convictions about inborn traits, later affirmed by a study at the New York University School of Medicine under the direction of Dr. Alexander Thomas.

In 1951 Spock became Professor of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh's Medical School, but he did not care for the administrative aspects of the position and left after four years. During this time he published *A Baby's First Year* (with Dr. John Reinhart) and *Feeding Your Baby and Child* (with Miriam E. Lowenberg). He also began a monthly column for the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The articles reached a wide audience and brought Spock floods of mail and an award from the Child Study Association, also criticism that he dealt only with the problems of a "highly conven-



On a visit to Moscow, he tries out the rowing channel at the site of the 1980 Olympic competition, opposite. In the 1924 Olympics he rowed on the winning Yale University crew. At his home in Arkansas, left, his second wife Mary presents him with a cake during his 75th birthday party.

tional" society and ignored such serious issues as drugs, delinquency, and sex.

For the next 12 years Spock was at Cleveland's Western Reserve University as visiting professor of child development in the Department of Pediatrics and Psychiatry and also supervising pediatrician in the university's family clinic. During these years he compiled two collections of articles from his columns, *Dr. Spock Talks with Mothers* and *Problems of Parents*, transferred his column to *Redbook* magazine, where it still appears, and published, with Marion Larrigo, *Caring for Your Disabled Child*. The book was well received by professional groups and used as a text in some colleges and nursing courses.

TEEN TALK. Spock tackled some of the pertinent issues of the day with publication in 1970 of *A Teenager's Guide to Life and Love*. Stating that some adolescent readers might find his conventional stance "pathetic," but that the book was really for the "shy kid who needs reassurance," he emphasized the old traditional virtues, held that inhibition is natural, and that civilization is built on restraints. He turned thumbs down on tobacco and alcohol, was against anything but group dating until age 16 or 17 and anything beyond "kissing or embracing" if there is no commitment to marriage; at the same

time he suggested that it may be a wholesome thing for young people who are mature enough to live together before marriage.

Harking back to his own strict upbringing by his parents, he found dirty clothes and messy rooms inexcusable, advocated daily showers, politeness, and "getting your chores done before your parents have to prod you." But he won no admirers in the feminist movement by insisting that a woman's place is mostly in the home, at least until the children are seven or eight years old.

In a column Spock spelled out his thoughts on the use of marihuana by young people: the hallucinogen should be avoided but is less harmful than heroin, the amphetamines and barbiturates, lysergic acid diethylamide, alcohol, and tobacco, and the harsh laws against casual marihuana use should be repealed and replaced by some kind of legalization and control.

POLITICAL ACTIVIST. Politics was of only peripheral interest to Spock until 1960, when he supported John F. Kennedy and endorsed his proposal for Medicare, to the dismay of some of his medical colleagues. What Spock called his conversion to a militant in pursuit of world peace came in 1962 when the President announced that the United States, in response to Soviet actions, would resume nuclear testing in the atmosphere. Spock was op-

posed, believing that without a test-ban treaty more children would die of cancer or leukemia or be born with birth defects. "I saw it as a pediatric problem."

He was also impressed by the Women's March For Peace movement and decided that if mothers could mobilize to express their feelings it was his moral responsibility to do the same. He became a sponsor of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), which capitalized on his fame with a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*, headed "Dr. Spock Is Worried." Written by Spock, the appeal warned of the radioactive contamination of milk and other food from nuclear testing and its effect on the health of growing children.

His first years in the peace movement, Spock later wrote, were excruciatingly painful. Conspicuous among casually dressed protesters by his great height, his conservative, immaculately tailored suits, and dignified bearing, he campaigned so energetically that the tension manifested itself in what was diagnosed as an auricular flutter, his pulse jumping to 240 beats per minute. He was hospitalized for four days and then restricted his schedule for a time but stepped up his activities in February, 1965, when President Johnson ordered bombing and a buildup of ground forces in Vietnam. Spock appealed to the President to honor his campaign promises, and when this proved futile the pediatrician again took to the streets. "This changed my whole life and even my personality. I quadrupled my antiwar activities after that."

By 1967 Spock was so involved in antiwar efforts that he retired from the faculty of Western Reserve a year early, afraid that his militancy might jeopardize the university. His plan was to alternate monthly the sailing of his 35-ft. ketch, *Carapace*, in the Caribbean with the peace movement. Such was not the case; his sense of outraged morality was too strong. He marched with groups that mobilized to end the war in Vietnam, was part of the delegation that turned in draft cards to the Department of Justice, campaigned in primaries for peace advocates, was arrested in Manhattan for crossing police lines in a civil disobedience action at the armed forces induction center, made some 150 speeches a year.

Unfavorable mail poured in; he was called a traitor and senile; the sales of *Baby and Child Care* fell drastically. A prominent clergyman delivered a widely publicized attack asserting that the irresponsibility and lack of discipline among the young people stemmed from Spock's "permissive" book that counseled instant gratification.

Spock was unshaken by this and other attacks, perhaps recalling that a number of his Dutch an-

cestors had been religious and political dissidents; one, John Hooper, had been burned at the stake for refusing to recant his opinions on the English Reformation. In his book *Decent and Indecent: Our Personal and Political Behavior* (1970), which he called a "spiritual biography" and a "cry from the heart of a public citizen," he wrote: "Though I have been blamed for the radicalization of youth, I think it would be more true to say that it is they who have radicalized me."

He collaborated with Mitchell Zimmerman on *Dr. Spock on Vietnam*, a forceful exposition of America's involvement in southeast Asia. The book sold some 80,000 copies, but it was not yet in print when Spock, Yale chaplain William Sloan Coffin, and three others were indicted in 1968 on the charge of conspiracy to aid and abet violations of the Selective Service Act. In the trial one was exonerated, the other four found guilty as charged, and Spock and Coffin were in addition fined \$5000 each. Spock contended that the war was illegal and unconstitutional and that therefore he was supporting the law, not disobeying it, citing the Nuremberg principle that one is obligated to refuse to carry out orders that are a crime against humanity. The Court of Appeals reversed the conviction, on the grounds that the judge's instructions to the jury had been improper.

In 1971 Spock became the candidate for president on the United States People's Party. Able to get his name on the ballot in only 10 states, he expected, and got, only a handful of votes but expressed his beliefs in a radical platform: immediate withdrawal of all United States forces from bases around the world, decentralized power structure at all levels of government, legalization of marihuana and abortion, the establishment of child care centers, and high-quality free medical care for everyone. But, he remarked ruefully, "People just want me to talk about child care."

In 1976, after 49 years, the Spocks were divorced, and a few months later he married 35-year-old Mary Morgan Councille, also a militant, and a mother of an 11-year-old daughter by a previous marriage. Last September she and Spock were among the 11 persons arrested on criminal charges of trespass when they marched in protest against the Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire, and two months later they led demonstrators in Tulsa to a federal hearing on Oklahoma's first proposed nuclear plant. Spock continues to see his function as a pediatrician inextricably tied with his militancy. "There is a close connection between bringing up children healthy and happy and making a world in which they can stay alive."

SUMMING UP. A crusading pediatrician.

