

# PARADE MAGAZINE

## Nobody's Children

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### WHY A BOY RUNS AWAY FROM HOME

Second in a Series *(Reprinted)*

A 15-YEAR-OLD SPEAKS FOR 300,000 OTHERS: 'MY PARENTS DON'T WANT ME!'

Last week, PARADE called attention to America's army of wandering teen -agers and revealed how police in every state pass them from hand to hand until they wind up broke, hungry and all too oft en, ripe for some criminal act. Today, PARADE offers the case history of one runaway.

On the evening of June 27<sup>th</sup>, just about dusk, Capt. Mike Sullivan of the El Paso County, Texas Sheriff's Patrol, picked up a 15-year-old hitchhiker on Route 80 west of the city.

A lean, owlish boy from a small town near Madison, Wisconsin, Allan had been on the road a week. He had left home he told Sullivan, after "some trouble with my parents." Now with \$3.50 in his pocket, he was headed north to Colorado and Wyoming to see the country.

Sullivan placed Allan in the county's modern juvenile detention home. His parents were notified he had been picked up. Four days later, his father wired bus fare and Allan went back to Wisconsin.

The handling of Allan's case was certainly a cut above the standard bum's rush America's teen-age runaways get-but it still fell short of the ideal. No probation department could be contacted to handle the home end of the case. As a result, Allan left El Paso with no real effort to answer the most important question of all.

Why did he run away? Yet this is the question that America with perhaps as many as 300,000 roaming teen-agers on its hands must answer before it can find a cure for the runaway problem. To cut this vast army of wanderers down to size, we must first identify the social pressures that caused its growth. To straighten out an individual youngster, we must learn the conditions that warped him.

But teamwork among the states has been badly lacking. The few attempts that have been made have so bogged down in red tape that police and welfare agencies have ignored them. In this vacuum, the ruthless, if often well meaning practice of "floating" passing the drifter on the next community has flourished.

Why does a teenager run away from home? One Miami juvenile officer thought he knew the answer. "Tell parents in your article that they ought to treat their kids a little more decent, and give them

more love and affection," he told PARADE. "Then they wouldn't run away."

A slightly different slant comes from Judge William G. Gardiner, of the Pinellas County, Florida Juvenile Court. "To me, our society does everything to destroy the home," he says. "You have to look right into the home to solve the runaway problem. With children, the schools say we'll give them the religion and the Government says we'll feed them if they're in need. All this destroys the institution of the family.

#### The Kids' Reasons

These replies are close to the truth, but they don't quite hit it dead center. Often the causes aren't so clear cut. When California studied its runaway problem, each youth was asked why he left home. "Home trouble" was listed most often, adventure was second, hunting for a job was third. But Herman Stark, director of the California Youth Authority, thinks the reasons overlap. "If a kid was happy at home," he says, "no amount of adventure could lure him away."

A bad home situation doesn't always imply open warfare between the boy and his parents. Quite often, tension boils just beneath the surface. The parents are completely flabbergasted when a child runs away from what they consider a perfectly serene home life, but he considers an intolerable relationship.

Allan was such a case. Imaginative and with a flair for adventure, the boy turned naturally from the harsh realities at home to the romantic fancies of the road. He was naïve and somewhat embittered. He walked with temptation but managed to sidestep it. In short, he was representative of many thousands who are nobody's children. For this reason, PARADE visited him in Wisconsin after his return to try to dig out the makings of a runaway. From one boy's story, a good deal of light is shed on the whole problem.

When Captain Sullivan stopped Allan, the boy looked hurt. "I'm not doing anything," he said, "Can't a person travel?" The policeman opened Allan's small bag and inspected his gear, a pair of swimming trunks, a towel, two bars of soap, a lightweight jacket, a jar of honey, some raisins, a hunting knife with a 7-inch blade. "The honey and raisins were for energy," Allan explained, the knife was to protect myself from rattlesnakes and things."

This was Allan's story, told politely but reluctantly. He had run away five times before. "The others were short trips up to 30 miles." On this trip, he had slept in small hotels, three nights in the open, building a small campfire and using his jacket as a pillow on the other nights. No, he had never been "floated." He hadn't even seen a policeman on the way southwest.

A few minutes before, a man had picked him up and bluntly propositioned him. Allan asked to be let out of the car immediately. "If he would've got rough, I was thinking I'd wave the knife at him," the boy said.

Cautiously, he asked Captain Sullivan, "What'll you do with me now?" "Contact your parents and see what they want done with you." "I know what they'll say!" the boy burst out bitterly. "They'll say they don't give a darn! They don't like me, that's all!"

Allan's parents, a hard-working couple in their mid-30's were frankly baffled when told of this outburst. But they admitted a lot of Allan's behavior baffled them.

His mother, Lucille, thin and bespectacled, said they had been losing their hold over Allan since he was 9 years old. That year a brother Danny was born. "I think Allan resented Danny," their mother says. He was the only child in the family up to then.

In the following six years, there were a number of points of friction. But each one seemed to trace back to Danny's birth when Allan was gradually eased out of the Spotlight and began to feel unwanted. Looking back, you could imagine each incident proving to him that his parents didn't love him.

### **He Never Opened Up**

Allan's resentment wasn't open. He withdrew into himself. "He never opened up," his mother said, "You never knew what he was thinking or feeling inside." Allan's explanation is a tip off on his feelings. "I didn't want to bother them," he says.

Each time Allan ran away, his parents tried to find out what was wrong, but they had no success. They also tried to be demonstrative and to buy him gifts, which showed they really did care for him. In fact, they moved from Milwaukee to their present home, a two-bedroom basement apartment in a small town surrounded by open countryside in the hope that Allen's love of the outdoors might keep him at home.

But none of these ideas worked. The first time Allan ran away, he was 13. His trip took him from Milwaukee to Waukesha, a distance of 30 miles. A few days later, he got as far as Kenosha. On his third try, he reached Chicago.

After that trip, Allan's teacher suggested the parents arrange with welfare authorities for some treatment for the boy. Instead the family decided to try moving to the country. The outdoor life did seem to agree with Allan, at least for a while. He often went into the woods to camp overnight, usually alone, and sometimes he sat under the trees for hours watching the birds and animals.

About the same time, in the manner of all adolescents, he began to "notice himself." He brooded about his glasses and his thin build. He withdrew even more. When things got too tough last May, he cashed a \$25 bond and ran off again to Chicago. In a week he came back-by train. He seemed more balky than ever. "I couldn't do anything with him," says his mother.

He refused to help his father around the house, particularly with heavier chores like laying sod for the lawn or gravelling the driveway. One day, Allan wanted to go to town to shop. His father told him to finish his work first. The boy's answer was to run away for the fifth time.

He got as far as Hayward, in northeast Wisconsin, and then after two days, he came back. For the first time, his parents had an inkling of why he left. He wrote a note saying what he had been "through" with them for four years and that they didn't care for him anyway. When he came back his parents tried to be casual, but Allan kept his bag packed. On Father's Day, he began running again.

He and his father had been working in the yard that day. His mother took some snap-shots, and it was obvious Allan was unhappy. "You could see the resentment in his face," she says.

After his father had gone out, Allan announced to his mother that he was leaving, "I said, 'Please Allan, talk to me once and tell me

what's the matter," she says. "He said again that he and his dad were through four years ago, and that nobody cared for him. I tried to find out why but he wouldn't talk. So I asked him why he bothered to come back from Hayward. He said, 'Okay, if that's the way you want it, I'll keep going and not come back.' He didn't kiss me goodbye or anything, all he said was 'I'll see you.'"

A few days later, his parents received a postcard in Allan's awkward handwriting, postmarked Abilene Texas. It read:

Dear Mother and Dad-I love you and am sorry I hurt you. Hope you will be all right. Am cold, tired and wish I was home. Hope Danny and Kathy are OK. Say Hello to Dan for me. Wonder if Dad got the sod in. I wish I was home. Your son, Allan.

A few days later, came the telegram from El Paso, followed by an airmail letter, announcing that Allan had been picked up. And a few days after that, Allan was back home. The boy who wouldn't talk to his parents was perfectly responsive when PARADE asked why he and his Dad were "through." The words tumbled out.

"Everything that my father ever gave me, he said he was going to break it or burn it whenever he got angry with me. Sure, he had reason to get angry with me, I guess we never really got along. There was not particular reason just a lot of little things."

Many of the "little things" seem to be rooted in the six-year-old resentment of Danny's arrival. Here are a few of them: Allan and his dad quarreled over his schoolwork, "He tried to help and he'd lose his patience and call me stupid," the boy says. "I wouldn't answer back, he was my father, I'd just carry it inside."

"I just didn't realize what the effects would be," his father says. "I was really mad at the school system that wasn't teaching him right. It was because Allan wasn't dumb, that I was mad at him."

Allan resented being a baby-sitter for Danny and his sister Kathy. "I'd have some plan to do something and then I'd come home and find I had to baby-sit. I guess I didn't like my baby brother too much because I always had to take care of him."

"He didn't like to work around the house. He never liked to be told what to do or when to do it," his mother says. "Then there was the matter of the accordion lessons. I had a bunch of money stuck into that accordion," his father, a factory hand says. "He resisted it after a while. I think that's why he left the first time."

His parents have been trying hard to change things since Allan came back from El Paso. "I think we've all learned a lesson," his father says. "I told him when he came back, 'Remember Allan, this is your home here and your family. You're always welcome here. We want you around us.'"

To show he meant it, his father bought Allan a motor scooter-although he couldn't afford the \$200 it cost, and Allan has warmed up to Danny. "I know guys who don't have brothers and sisters. They don't have company. I take Dan fishing and places that's fun for both of us."

His parents are trying to cut down on his baby-sitting chores. But his father asks, "The once in a while we go out, surely he don't expect me to hire a girl and pay out \$3."

Most of the time he watches TV or reads books anyway at night. As for working at home; "He's got to do a little around the place, he lives in it too."

Allan's father also has promised to keep his temper in check. A little man -- he's only 5 ft 6 ½ in tall, "always had an inferiority complex," he says. "What you can't do with your hands, you do with your tongue. I guess that helps explain the ribbing and ridicule I threw at Allan. But there'll be no more of it."

Will this new deal overcome the old resentments and keep Allan at home? His Mother who thinks maybe they should have taken that Welfare Department offer to help "hopes and prays" that it will. His father, who hit the road as a youth himself, doubts it. And Allan talks a little wistfully of heading for the Coast next summer.

Today, Allan is at a crossroads. One road will lead him to a stable life and acceptance of adult responsibilities. If he takes the other, he may keep running and running until he reaches the end of the line.

#### **NEXT WEEK:**

No one admits it, but everyone is responsible for the present runaway problem. PARADE reveals the shocking lack of program and facilities in your state -- and every state.

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***Thanks to Jody Taylor, AJCA Secretary, Idaho ICJ, for locating these two articles.***