

"Date-Line" / Hawaii

Ele and Walt Dulaney

Gaining Rapport

The school auditorium's house lights are on—the youthful faces staring up at us are expressionless. Things could go either way with this group. The student body prexy completes his introduction, “. . . and here they are, the writers of DATE-LINE, ELE AND WALT DULANEY!” Then he beckons us onstage to polite light applause.

“Hel-lo! We're here to talk about a number of things that interest us—everything from studies and school, to surfing and sex.” A stir in the audience. “You've probably noticed that we're an interracial couple We used to say a 'mixed' marriage, but it made us sound all confused. So now we simply point out that one of us is Irish-English-Scotch-German-and-American Indian, and the other isn't.” “Now wait a minute, BUSTER!” says Ele tugging at the mike. “That line goes: One half of our team is JAPANESE, and the other ISN'T!” A good solid laugh—we're on our way.

Walt takes the mike back and grins at the audience. “You may note too that the light reflects from my teeth—that's because I'm in braces engineering a new smile for television. This often makes people ask, 'How do you kiss someone who wears braces?' and the answer is 'Carefully, very carefully!' ” A wave of solid laughs now; the faces are smiling, we're in business!

Our business is young people—Hawaii's junior citizens and young adults. We talk to them in assemblies like this.

The Approach

As we try to help our young friends through our writing and personal contacts, humor is our strong weapon. Often by stretching a problem situation to an absurdity, we can help them see things with a fresh perspective, and find a better way to deal with, or accept, their situation.

On problems of parental vetoes of desired dates, etc., we say, “Look at it this way. If your parents didn't supply your food, you'd be too weak to stagger out of the door to date. And if they didn't give you a place to live, you'd be too busy earning rent money to have time to date. And if they didn't provide your clothing, you'd be too nude to date! So you see that your parents have a real right to say whom you date and where you go as long as they're providing the necessities that make your social life possible.” And more often than not there are sheepish nods of agreement, as youngsters see things in this new way.

We try too to show young people that there's no such thing as a bad question or a foolish concern. If you've got a problem, let it out in the open air, don't

brood on it. Our policy is to answer every question as frankly as decency permits, and to admit openly when we don't know the answer, and then seek the advice of experts (clergymen, counselors, models, doctors, psychologists) for later reply.

The Letters

Themes. An average month brings 250-300 letters. The majority ask four basic questions: "How can I meet her?" "How can I get rid of her?" "How far should we go in date love making?" and "Why—parents?" These are no different from the mainland letters that appear in Dear Abby, Ann Landers, *et al.*

Only in Hawaii. But it is the minority of "only in Hawaii" letters that make our mail columns fun. For instance:

"Our club is having a mother-daughter banquet. I'd like to take my mom—but she eats only with hashi (chopsticks). What should I do?"

"When you present a lei, do you have to kiss the girl even if she's just like a sister to you?"

"How do you tell a boy diplomatically that your dad won't let you go out with him again if he shows up for a date in barefeet?"

Our Answers. A note on our letter-answering technique: We try never to give a "this is it" answer. Instead we attempt to sketch the alternatives possible in the given situation and suggest other resources: Child and Family Service, ministers, and library books that could be consulted for further insights. On simple etiquette questions, however, we do state the generally accepted practice.

Servicemen's Letters. The saddest letters we receive come from servicemen who are lonesome for feminine companionship and seek our help in meeting "nice local girls." Although sympathizing with the military male, we feel strongly that local practice cuts a girl off the marriage prospect list of local males once she becomes known as a "serviceman's date." So we do not try to encourage such mixing. Instead we suggest the serviceman sublimate his loneliness in worthwhile community service, youth club advising, church work, community theatre volunteering. But we know it's a rare serviceman who takes this advice to heart.

Problems of Etiquette

Many of our young friends find little or no guidance at home in developing social manners. The boys especially find it difficult to feel confident enough to open doors, pull out chairs, and display other common courtesies toward their dates. Perhaps this reflects in part the Oriental background where women once waited upon men, and walked obediently in their wake.

Eating is a problem. It's very hard to eat your spaghetti in silence, when you've been taught to inhale your saimin with appreciative slurps. Some students who have highly polished manners in every other area still forget and smack their lips while eating "haole" banquet fare.

Conversation is another area of concern to many of these young people "on-their-way-up." Possibly because of the "thou canst commit no greater sin

than speaking pidgin" emphasis of past teachers, they carefully phrase every sentence and forget that the essence of speech is communication. These are the youngsters who write complaining of conversational "droughts." We advise them to speak naturally—an occasional "da kine" is no great crime—and encourage them to take conversational "insurance" on dates. (To do this, we urge them to prepare a "crib" sheet with five conversational topics they could talk on without great effort, e.g., latest hit record, favorite TV show, future plans, top sport, club activities. Then when they run dry they may simply excuse themselves to blow their noses or powder their faces and glance at the secreted topics for inspiration.)

The Conflicts of Hawaii

The favorite part of our job is chatting in person with the "coming-generation." We always preface our talks by stating that "We're no experts. What we are going to say is mainly personal opinions—and your ideas may be every bit as good as ours." We encourage them to argue, take exception, or contradict our views. Our goals are two-fold: to present them with a wide range of alternatives (we'd rather have them select their ideas from the widest range of possibilities) and to express themselves.

These "free-for-alls" reveal again and again that Hawaii is not the "conflict-free" Utopia of HVB publicity. The questions and comments of the young people reveal that there are still several barriers in "paradise" that need to be lowered.

There is, for instance, a real cleavage between the students of public and private schools, often on a "have" and "have not" basis of separation. Many public school youngsters touchily expect the private school students to "look down" upon them. While the private scholars "know" that public school "kids are out to get us."

Nobody burns lawn-crosses in Hawaii, but it doesn't take the Klu Klux Klan to provide racial separations. The youngster doesn't have to scan "AJA only" rental ads in the paper to realize that his parents "prefer" their own kind.

We've already mentioned the gulf between the local population and the serviceman. A similar divide separates the kamaaina from the mainland newcomer. The new worker in an office need say only once "but back on the mainland we did it *this* way . . ." to earn a "pushy mainlander" label from his co-workers.

To our way of thinking, the only way to lessen these clefts is to bring them out to public gaze, and so whenever possible we point out that "Mississippi isn't the only state with problems of warring factions; Hawaii has them too. Let's recognize them—and do something about them!"

Interracial Marriage

Since ours is an interracial marriage we receive a great many questions on "inter-racial dating" and "mixed marriages." We always preface our comments by pointing out that more mixed marriages break up than nonmixed marriages. And we add that parents certainly do have the right to disapprove of "interracial dating" if they're supporting one of the youngsters involved.

In cases where there are no parental objections, we recommend that the youngster begin dating within his own racial group so that he can be sure that he "swings" with his own people before seeking companionship outside. And then we point out that interracial dating motivated by a desire for a partner who's different or exotic lacks a healthy basis. Cases in point are the young mainland surfers who see "Sayonara" and head to Hawaii with the desire for a "cute Japanese girl-friend, because Japanese girls are ultra-feminine, soft-spoken, and treat a man like a king!" We point out that with this stereotype they're very likely to be blind to the real character of girls they meet.

In our question periods at the end of personal appearances, we're frequently asked what pressures we've experienced in our own interracial marriage. The answer we give in all honesty is that we have much less trouble from our racial differences, than we do from our gender differences. We can see eye-to-eye much easier as Japanese and haole than we can as woman and man. There's just a gulf in logic and values between the feminine and masculine that needs constant bridging."

Youth and the Present

Again and again we tell our young friends: "These are not, contrary to graduation pronouncements, the 'best years of your life.' Life does not *end* with your twentieth birthday—it *begins*. The real, fun, exciting time starts when you're self-supporting and able to make your own decisions!"

We feel there's a very negative motivation in building the "teen years" as the pinnacle of life. If this is the top—why go on? We respect the Oriental systems that valued the gaining of wisdom, and smoothing of character that is possible with increasing age. How much more healthy it is to look ahead to maturity with eagerness than to look back to receding youth with *longing!*

Youngsters who are reared with the "teens are the highpoint" philosophy are liable to give in to any impulse of the moment, and satisfy their desire for momentary kicks—for what matters the future? But youngsters who have future long-range goals are more likely to forego immediate thrills for future achievement. It is this attitude we constantly encourage.

We like our work. It's varied, always challenging, and immensely satisfying. At times we long for a magic wand to whisk all of our young people's problems away, but there is none. A second reflection tells us that there is a real purpose in the trials of the teens and twenties; they forge character.

So whenever we have no explicit advice to offer, and no reference to suggest, we fall back on this story, to make the point that some things in life must just be borne:

A plane was flying from Hawaii to the Mainland. Just as it reached the mid-point of no return, the pilot discovered the fuel gauge was broken—they were out of gas! Desperately he radioed "Pilot to tower . . . pilot to tower . . . do you read me?" Immediately came the answer from Hawaii, "Tower to pilot . . . tower to pilot . . . we read you . . . what is your trouble?" As the plane dropped lower and lower, he shouted, "Pilot to tower . . . I'm half way across the Pacific and I'm out of gas . . . what should I do? WHAT SHOULD I DO? And the answer came, "Tower to pilot, tower to pilot . . . repeat after me . . . 'Our Father Who art in Heaven . . .'"