



GARY LAUTENS

Do I have a message? You bet!

A SCHOOLBOY named Howard Greenspan was in the office the other day to talk to me about education, leisure time, writing, cigarettes, The Bomb, careers, television.

He is writing something for his yearbook and wondered if I might have a Message, something to solve The Problem of Being Young.

Oh, yes. Youth is a Problem these days. Everything is. We only face problems, stumbling blocks and, now and then, a good crisis. We have become terrible pessimists, all of us.

Howard is a rather happy boy but even he is concerned about automation, about the race question, about the accident rate on our highways, about . . .

Don't listen

Dear me! He has been reading the newspapers and listening to the politicians and paying too much attention in general to grown-ups. And life becomes very frightening, indeed, if you take them seriously.

Of course, there is more to life than a giggle broken up with an occasional guffaw. But somehow we forget to mention the fun of it. And it truly is a joy. That's why we fight so hard to stay alive.

Grown-ups enjoy a good grumble. That's why they do it so often. However, I have never met one of them who would truly trade places, completely, that is, with anyone else. They are quite convinced their children are the very best, that their easy chair is quite the cosiest place in the world, that their wives really aren't so bad after all.

You see, Howard, it's part of a game. Most of us are terribly lucky and terribly happy but we don't want it to show. It's

rather like a pitcher who is in the middle of a no-hit game. He doesn't want to mention his good fortune for fear it might break the spell.

My young friend is also concerned that this is the very worst of times to be young. He has been brainwashed into thinking that 1964 is a bogeyman. I remember being told the same thing—only then the year was 1940.

Why, any time is a marvellous time to be young but this is the very best of all.

Some cynic

Don't listen to the cynic who drives a \$5,000 car and tells you about his troubles! Pay no heed to the lady who complains her dishwasher has sprung a leak! They are blessed and must know it if they think at all.

Can you imagine being born 200 years ago, in "the good old days?" Why, my mother would never have been able to survive her diabetes. How many of my friends and yours would never have lived past childbirth or died soon after from pneumonia or been forced to undergo an operation without anesthetic?

Plagues swept the world and killed millions at a time. Only a few years ago polio was a crippling nightmare but a pill has changed so much of that. Tomorrow, Howard, there will be new cures. The war against suffering is gradually being won, not lost.

The power of dreams

Life was comparative drudgery. You couldn't turn a dial and see the very best talent the world has to offer. Oh, yes, there are commercials and bad shows on television—but think of the magic of it and the joy.

There was a time when a father could never hope for something better for his son

than the same life which tied him to his farm or shop. But now a boy can become almost anything he dreams.

Some people, Howard, claim these are the cruellest of times but it isn't so. Great nations spend billions now in charity and they talk and plan for world government for peace and for a war against poverty. No one gets hanged for taking a loaf of bread any more and law is taking us farther and farther out of the jungle.

Of course, there are flaws. This isn't Utopia. But sometimes the complainers make you think that sin is something that just was invented in 1964, that atoms mean only bombs and not a new door to be opened on tomorrow's surprises.

An actor sleeps with an actress without benefit of clergy, a union leader dips into the not-so-petty cash, some young boys raise a rumpus and, yes, a president is killed; and we are certain that civilization is doomed. We are all stamped brutal and immoral.

The right road

What nonsense. How many people do you know, Howard, who are "evil" or "cruel?" Most are very much just like yourself—sometimes frightened, sometimes selfish, sometimes thoughtless, but generally the sort you'd like for a friend.

You don't condemn a road because of an occasional pot hole. And I think the road we travel is aimed in the right direction.

So, Howard, the Message is this: Don't be gloomy. Each day is an adventure. Try your very best and trust in something other than grouchy men who take themselves so seriously. Learn a lot and love a lot.

And remember: The world can't be too bad. It produced your mother and father, you know.