

a New York penthouse, far from any playmates. I worry more about what will come out of the noisy, overpopulated household I live in here, if I have the flu, all siblings and various neighbors' 16 children say, the lone remaining child hours searching for a playmate, knowing that there's nothing to do, not our children to get along with and they do. But what about getting along without people? What about getting along with themselves?

to imagine my four children as children. I try to treat them as if they aren't that many hours a day. There aren't that many people in the house either (though the only one—and consequently seldom, gets a room of his own because "he can't share a room with his mother"). My children are learning without effort how to get along comfortably in a world of people, those lessons the children of solitude find so hard. But I have no time, no space, for other things—how to brood, how to discover solitude in the mind itself, even how to be deeply, continuously unhappy, as the lonely are unhappy, and how to do something come of it. And these things are harder still.

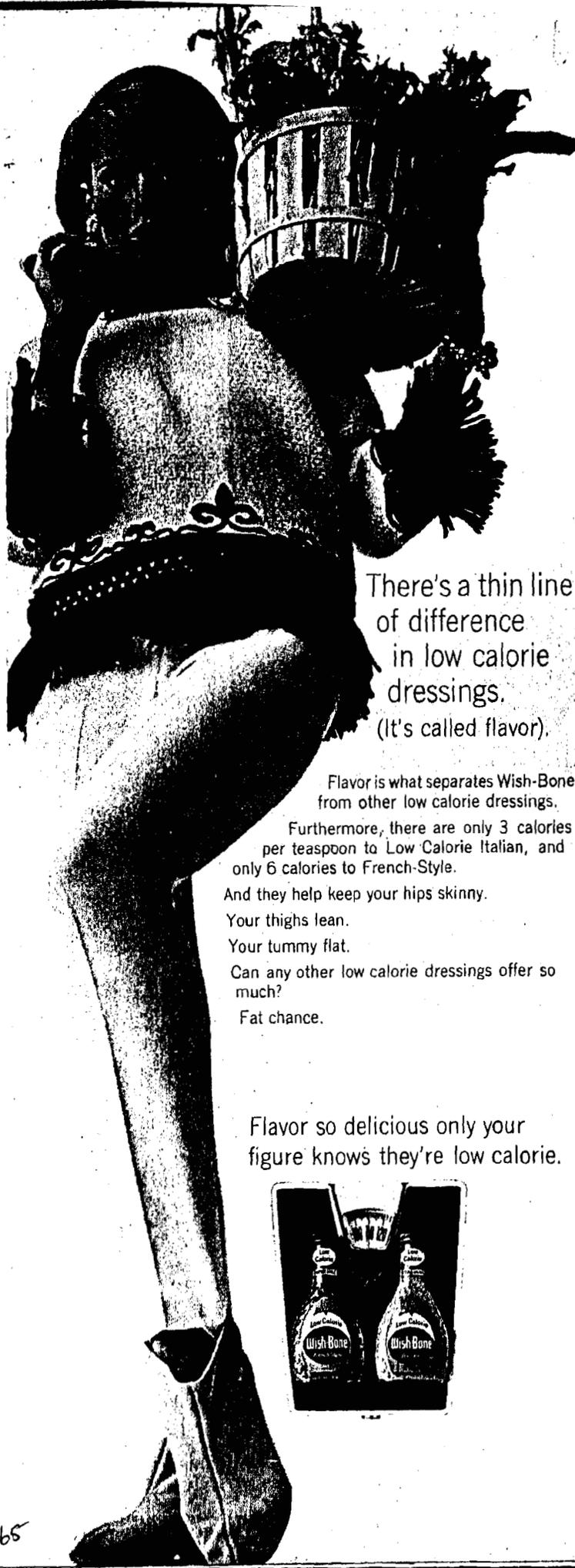
know that loneliness doesn't guarantee a rich inner life. My home is a noisy one, and I can't revolutionize it for the off chance of producing a creative child. I can't even complain about it; my children are, after all, happy and busy to have around. But there are things I can do.

I can try to have a little time, every day alone with each of them—although I do not have a tête-à-tête with my mother. It is more likely to be of the hollow-can-I-go-over-to-Roger variety than anything John Stuart Mill's father would have recognized.

I can single them out by artificial means. I can take one, not two or three hours, to the special play or movie. But that's not fair? Hasn't everybody an equal right to go with mother to *My Fair Lady*? I have been waiting 14 years for a chance of them to get good and sick, so I would try out the uses of adversity. (I remember the darkened room and sore throat when my mother read *The Pilgrim's Progress*.) But they are as healthy as they are well adjusted. I can encourage solitary activities and give them space when they are up in their rooms reading, choking down any temptation to come out. "Why are you moping around in your room when it's such a lovely day?"

books I can recognize as my greatest solace. A book is a child's solitary citadel. Reading, unlike TV-watching, Brownies, and a host of other constructive activities, is done alone. Somehow, amidst the noise and activity of the household, I try to find a place for solitude, but without signal success. The truly creative mind can make its own solitude, I suppose. (Emily Dickinson had an older brother and a sister.) And solitude can engulf a whole family, as it did the Montagu children, alone in their imagined world on the moors.

But those of us with large families have a problem. Solitude for each of our children may be an unattainable ideal. That is, we'll have to console ourselves with history's exceptions—the great men who came neither first nor last in their families. They include Michelangelo, Napoleon, Darwin, Tolstoy, Dostoevski, T.S. Eliot and Thomas Mann.



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