

# KIDS Growing Up SCARED

BY JERRY ADLER

**O**NCE, THEY WERE THE ENVY of the world, an exuberant army cruising on their fat-tired Schwinn's the curving streets of ten thousand subdivisions, sending a chorus of gleeful yelps toward the heavens that brought in predictable succession Christmas, birthdays and summer vacation—American kids! There was no higher state to which anyone could aspire, not even Nikita Khrushchev, who on his 1959 tour of the United States discovered that the second most powerful man in the world couldn't have what millions of American kids took as their birthright: a day at Disneyland. Unless you were black and people spat at you when you tried to go to school, or mentally handicapped and shut away in a misery-drenched state home, or you

*New fears  
and  
pressures  
are  
robbing a  
generation  
of its  
childhood*



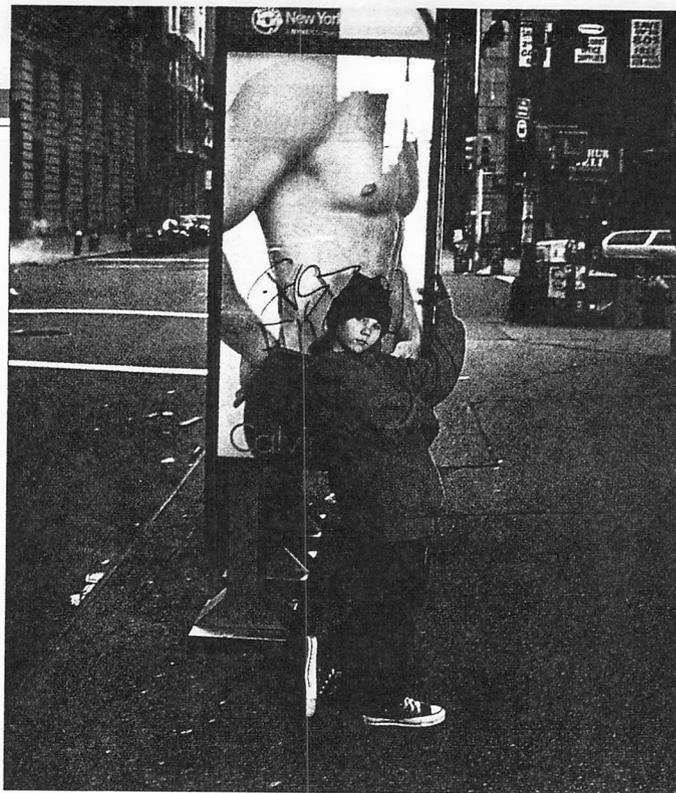
**Love and war:**  
*Vigil in Petaluma,  
prom in New  
Hampshire*

had the bad luck to go flying seatbeltless through the windshield of your family's car in an accident, life was pretty good and expected to get better, unless Khrushchev got mad enough to drop an atom bomb on your head. Surely no one could have foreseen that at the very time the threat of nuclear holocaust had been lifted, one of that baby-boom horde—Sally Jablon, 46, who grew up in suburban Long Island—would send her two boys out to play on the utterly placid streets of West Newton, Mass., only to have them return a few minutes later, alone. None of the other parents on the block would let their children out of the house.

Something precious has gone out of American culture, and we don't know how to get it back. We may not even realize our loss until we leave the country—like Tufts professor David Elkind, an authority on child develop-

ment, who visited a small town in Canada recently and was amazed to be greeted by an 8-year-old boy he passed on the street. Elkind's first thought was that the child must be retarded, because who else would talk to a strange man in public? Not even Christmas could dispel the gloom that settled over the nation as Polly Klaas was buried in California and as police from 97 jurisdictions pressed the hunt for the killer of Cassidy Senter and Angie Housman in suburban St. Louis. It was especially glum in Denver, where an anonymous threat to murder shopping-mall Santas forced many to relocate to the safety of fire and police stations.

But what we've lost goes beyond the fear of crime. It is the unspoken consensus that held children to be a privileged class deserving protection from adult concerns and responsibilities. Increasingly they are left to fend for themselves in a world of hostile strangers, dangerous sexual enticements and mysterious economic forces that even adults find unsettling. Your mother is on a business trip, your father is skiing with his other set of kids and your teacher has been suspended for telling a



LINDA COVELLO

**Unsafe sex:** Knowledge by definition puts an end to innocence

seventh-grade girl she reminds him of Veronica Lake. Now, go do your homework.

It is, perhaps, a little mush-brained to mourn the lost innocence of Petaluma, Calif., when babies in parts of Los Angeles have to sleep in bathtubs to avoid stray bullets coming through the windows. But the actual physical threat to children is less important than the perception of danger. There were almost 36 million American children between the ages of 5 and 14 in 1991, and only 519 of them were murdered. Actual mortality among children this age has dropped steadily for decades, to less than half the 1950 rate. This is because influenza has killed more children than all the kidnappers and drive-by shootings in history. But the fear of crime is almost a separate phenomenon from the real danger it poses. "I see people who are completely lunatic about the safety of their children," says Michael Thompson, a Cambridge, Mass., psychologist who counsels children at private schools. Newton police were surprised to hear that parents were keeping their kids inside to play in their town, where the only murder in recent memory involved an expatriate Soviet physicist who killed a mathematician. "We don't have any of these types of crimes here," said Lt. Robert McDonald—"not that it couldn't happen."

The fear can be measured statistically: more than half the children (and 73 percent of the adults) questioned in a recent NEWSWEEK/Children's Defense Fund Poll said they were afraid of violent crime against them or a family member. And it shows up in behavior. Parents don't just keep an eye on children in the mall; they keep them leashed, to better tug them back

from potential molesters. "I used to think it was treating your children like a dog," says Mayumi Miles of West Los Angeles, the mother of a 2-year-old. "But after my friend's child was kidnapped [at an amusement park], I think they're a good idea." (The child was returned.) Once, just houses and cars had alarms, but after a burglary at their home in Del Mar, Calif., Roger and Lisa Cole put alarms on the entire family, including the babysitter. At the first sign of danger, they can pull a pin and summon witnesses to whatever befalls them. Even 2-year-old Jacob has an alarm on his stroller, although he doesn't go many places except the park and the beach. "The beach is not always a safe place," warns Roger, a research psychobiologist.

No one can blame parents for wanting to keep their children safe, but neither has anyone counted the psychic cost of raising them in a state of perpetual hypervigilance, ready to pull the alarm pin on any uncle who thoughtlessly ventures a tender pat. Disease still kills more children than stalkers. But disease is an impersonal, statistical disaster, not something you're personally responsible

## CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

### Single-Parent Homes

There has been a 200% growth in single-parent households since 1970, from 4 million to 8 million homes.

U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

### Working Mothers

The number of married moms leaving home for work each morning rose 65% from 10.2 million in 1970 to 16.8 million in 1990.

U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

### Married with Children

Married couples with children now make up only 26% of U.S. households, down from 40% in 1970.

U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

### Chores

36% of children said their chores included making their own meals in 1993. Only 13% said the same in 1987.

YANKELOVICH YOUTH MONITOR

### Crime Begins at Home

An estimated 70% of juvenile offenders come from single-parent families.

FBI UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS

## OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

### Television Violence

The average child has watched 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

### Real Violence

One in six youths between the ages of 10 and 17 has seen or knows someone who has been shot.

NEWSWEEK/CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND POLL

### Child Abuse

The estimated number of child abuse victims increased 40% between 1985 and 1991.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE

### Sex

In 1988, 26% of girls age 15 reported being sexually active, as compared to only 5% in 1970.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS

### Violent Crime

Children under 18 are 244% more likely to be killed by guns than they were in 1986.

FBI UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS

for avoiding when it sidles up to you in the playground. For that matter, even a decade ago it didn't occur to most sixth graders that they might someday wind up in an early grave if they didn't practice how to use a condom.

"I can't imagine having to be a child in this kind of world," says Julie O'Connor, a mother in Canoga Park, Calif., where children have been warned to be on guard against a serial attacker known as the Valley Molester. Her 5-year-old son once fled the yard at the sight of nothing more sinister than a car coming down the street. "One of the ways to help our own children is to prepare them," O'Connor says. "I have taught them how to scream at the top of their lungs if someone grabs them." The civic life of the town revolves increasingly around programs centered on child safety. If you're willing to be screened and fingerprinted by the police, you can put a SAFE HOUSE sign in your window, so that children will know it's OK to ask to use your telephone or bathroom. Or you can enroll in the Safe Corridor project and wear a special hat that entitles you to walk other people's children home from school.

When trouble comes to Canoga Park, it can hardly be expected to spare Brooklyn, N.Y. As many parents have discovered, almost as soon as children set out alone, they become targets. Cautious parents provide them with the rustiest three-speed bikes they can find, for the same reason that adults don't wear good jewelry on the subway. And the ideals that led parents to live in an integrated neighborhood in the first place are subverted when the child learns to run away from the kids from the project.

In Cambridge, Mass., 12-year-olds Daniel Skidmore and Max Hoffman roam freely through Harvard Square until dark, subject only to the requirement that Daniel call home every three hours. They are inured to the routine annoyances of urban life, content to share a table at a diner with a mentally ill man quietly muttering to himself. Daniel sometimes donates part of his \$5 allowance to the panhandlers he sees in Harvard Square, because he knows that life is unfair and "you can have a degree in law and still not get a job." Max refuses to part with any spare change on the ground that it might go to buy booze.

Naturally there are children who would happily exchange their actual lives for the

## Fears of the Unspeakable Invade a Tidy Pink Bedroom

**A**FTER POLLY KLAAS WAS KIDNAPPED from her bedroom in nearby Petaluma, Calif., Judith About gave her daughter Andrea, 10, a little motherly advice:

"I don't care if they have a weapon—*don't* go with them. Kick, scream, break things, scratch, go for the crotch, the eyeballs . . . *anything*." Andrea, who's in the fifth grade, got the message. "I thought it was good advice," she says. "I'd rip their eyeballs out."

Judith and Andrea About live in a three-bedroom house in Half Moon Bay, an idyllic

per capita than anywhere in the world, outside of a war zone.

Since the abduction of Polly Klaas, Half Moon Bay and East Palo Alto seem closer than ever, and Judith has become

eternally vigilant. "We always review the rules if we're going to the major stores," says the mother, 46. "Andrea has to stay with me and not go to the kids' department alone anymore. I've told her and my class all the lines not to fall for: 'Help me find my puppy,' 'I'm filming a commercial.'" These days, Andrea is confronted with the typically grim national news stories: she and her mom were wrapping Christmas presents when they came across a television report about the 9- and 10-year-old girls abducted and killed in suburban St. Louis. But she's also confronted by something grimmer still: the knowledge that Klaas's hometown looked an awful lot like her own. Last week, when she slept over at her friend Sandy's, the pair had every light on in the house: "We couldn't sleep until 2 a.m. because we were so scared of all those stories about Polly Klaas and the other girls."

Even in her own home, there are times when Andrea doesn't want to go into the kitchen by herself, let alone venture into her dark bedroom. "I like being at school where there's people everywhere," she says. "I like that safe feeling where you don't have to go down the hall and be scared of somebody popping out and taking you." But even at school there have been spooky reminders: her lunchroom hung with a reward poster trumpeting Klaas's abduction. Fear doesn't leave much time for Andrea to just relax, or to pursue her true obsession, roller coasters. "Oh, I just love them," she says. "I could live on one." Some might say she already does.

JEANNE GORDON in Los Angeles  
with JEFF GILES

*'We couldn't sleep because we were so scared of all those stories about Polly Klaas and the other girls'*



**Andrea About, 10, with her mother, Judith**

beach town an hour south of Petaluma. Andrea has a tidy pink bedroom, which she rearranges constantly. She covers her walls with elephant and dinosaur posters. She disdains "dolls and cutesy stuff." Judith teaches elementary school in a town that used to seem worlds away: East Palo Alto, home to more murders

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## Prisoners in a 10-Room Castle, Keeping Their Heads Low

**C**URTIS AND CHAD HOUSE FEEL like kids in a castle. Their home is a spacious, 10-room row house in Oakland, a middle-class black enclave of stately, refurbished houses on the South Side of Chicago. Their mother is a school administrator, their father a music teacher. Every day after school, the brothers, 12 and 9, return home to practice the flute, play videogames and talk to friends on the phone or through their computer. But the boys are forbidden to venture outside without an adult. And at no time are they to show their faces in the front window. As Curtis Sr. puts it, the family inhabits "a pocket" surrounded by public-housing projects where gun-wielding gangs deal drugs and fight for turf.

In 1980, before their boys were born, Kathy and Curtis House took a calculated risk: rather than move to the suburbs, they chose to become "urban pioneers." On Oakwood Boulevard, hub of a once prosperous black community, they found and totally rebuilt their brick-and-limestone home. They organize older residents of Oakland into an extended family network: when Curtis feels the itch to visit the mall, a retired neighbor takes him there. But the projects, and the violence they harbor, are never out of sight. The boys have witnessed muggings and gang fights. A few months ago Curtis was walking to the school bus when a gang from the projects started shooting. "I just ran to my bus and sat real low in my seat," he says. To their father, it's all a part of growing up. "If you shelter your child too much, it is very difficult to experience real-life tragedies firsthand," he says. "If my son sees the violence, sees the problems, he learns to cope."

But as adolescence approaches, Curtis feels confined living in a community where even a walk home alone from the

library is a rare and risky venture. "It bothers me a lot that I get cooped up in the house," he admits. "I know it's for my best interest, but sometimes I wish I could go by myself wherever I wanted to." He and Chad even talk about the need to carry guns for self-defense once they enter high school. "I think that you do need a gun sometimes because gangbangers do have their guns and one day you may have to have one to protect yourself."

That kind of talk chills their parents. "We are thinking about moving for the kids'

*'It bothers me to get cooped up in the house. I know it's for my best interest, but I wish I could go out by myself.'*



**Curtis House, 12, and brother Chad, 9**

sakes," their mother says. Oakwood Boulevard may be a secure haven, but there is no moat. "You pray and you take precautions," says Kathy House. But what do you do, she wonders, when boys can no longer be treated as children?

STANLEY HOLMES in Chicago with  
KENNETH L. WOODWARD

chance to sit next to a mental patient in Cambridge, or even be mugged in Brooklyn. But this is America. A generation ago, crimes directed specifically against children were virtually unheard of. Obviously they occurred—since so many people who are now adults recall being abused as children—but they were neither talked about nor, generally, prosecuted. In the decade of the 1950s, NEWSWEEK ran exactly five stories on child abuse, all on isolated incidents, none involving sexual assault. That is one fourth the number that appeared last year alone. Certainly no children's books took incest as a theme—or adult sexuality, divorce, crime, poverty or racial tension. No one wants to return to a world in which children suffered alone and in silence. But by definition, knowledge spells an end to innocence. A 6-year-old who learns about good and bad touching has taken the first step toward sexual sophistication. A 12-year-old bombarded with warnings about strangers, priests, friends of the family and fathers may begin to wonder why the burden of avoiding abuse has to fall so heavily on her—or, to put it another way, why can't these damn grown-ups control themselves?

Of course, many societies got by for a long time without believing that children have a special right to happiness just because they're children. Nobody gave much thought to sexual innocence until houses began to have more than one room. Anyone who thinks kids in Brooklyn have it tough should reread the "Little House" series. This nation was settled by families in constant danger of being killed in the Indian wars, carried off by wild animals or swept away by one natural disaster or another. Their descendants went on to fight two world wars and survive the Depression.

The special status of childhood was an invention of the Progressive Era in the late 19th century, and even then it took hold primarily among the middle class. It has always been tacitly recognized that wealthy, famous people might be too busy pursuing their own interests to concern themselves overly with their offspring—Joan Crawford, say. At the other end of the social spectrum was Huck Finn's notoriously dysfunctional family. It's a minor irony that the iconographic American boy was the offspring of an abusive, alcoholic father.

But the middle-class family was essentially a form of social organization devoted

*The Coles  
put  
alarms on  
all the  
family,  
even the  
babysitter*

to the nurturance of children. Its "security" and "safety" rested on the vigilance of an army of moms, whose presence in the home was taken so much for granted that schools could be built without lunchrooms. We all know what happened to that assumption, of course. Half of all marriages now end in divorce. Three quarters of married women with children 6 to 17 were in the labor force in 1992, as were nearly three fifths of those with children under 6. Yet even if we wanted to go back to the days when women rarely worked outside the home, it is no longer an economic possibility for

most families. Without taking sides in the debate over whether full-time mothers could be satisfactorily replaced by universal, high-quality day care, the fact is that too many kids today have neither.

What they have instead is what Elkind calls the "permeable" family—children half out the door, the outside world clamoring at the windows with its dangerous and seductive allure. Such families are founded not on the rock of marriage but on the shifting sands of consensual love, an agreement between partners that can be dissolved when it no longer meets their needs. Often there is no

parent at home most days, so children are left to themselves—to fix their own meals, set their own hours for television and homework, arrange their social lives. Says Elkind: "We see children as competent [for these things], even though there's no evidence that they are, because we need children who can handle day care, before-school programs, after-school programs, the things they see on TV. So we've revised our perception of childhood in line with our needs."

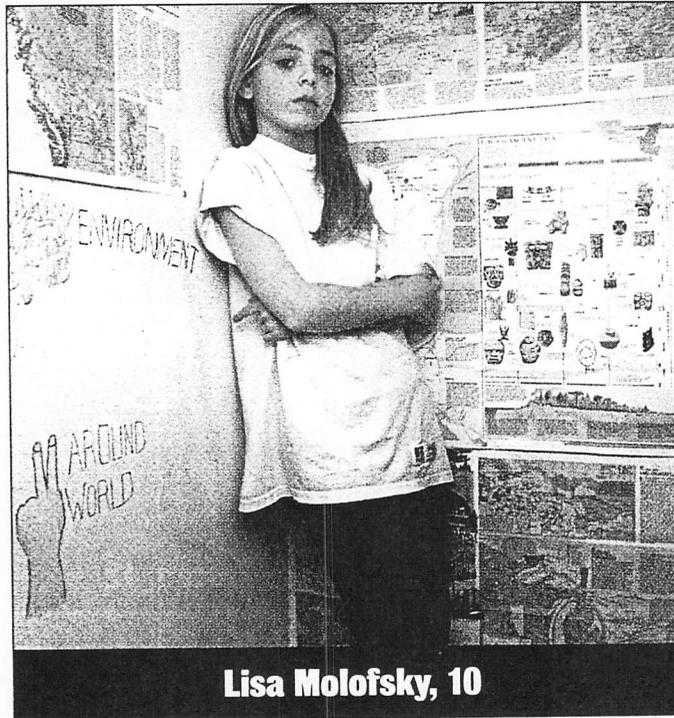
We can't all be rich, but anyone can be as self-centered as Donald Trump—that is the lesson of the last 25 years. "Decisions aren't made on the basis of what's best for the child, but what can the child tolerate," says James Garbarino, president of (Chicago's) Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in

## Saving the Earth? Maybe She Can Squeeze It In Next Week.

**L**ISA MOLOFSKY DOES not look the least bit abashed about being the first declared candidate for the presidential election of 2028. "Things need to change," she earnestly explains. "It's always been that men or boys come first. I think we need a woman president to show them that women are just as smart."

The 10-year-old ponytailed blonde is sitting cross-legged in a rocking chair in her small Austin, Texas, bedroom. Maps and nature posters cover every inch of wall space. When Lisa talks, her words tumble out so quickly that she can barely catch her breath. Right now she's talking about her major worries: pollution, overpopulation, burglars, the homeless, world hunger and the inability of everyone to get an education. Those are some of the reasons she wants to be president. "I figure, well, when I get older, I could try and change all those things . . . I just want it to be a perfect world."

In her own world, Lisa thinks it's "stupid" for her friends to waste time on clothes and makeup. She almost never wastes time. Her twin cravings—for doing good and getting ahead—take care of that. Last fall she organized a reseeded project at a wilderness area that had been



**Lisa Molofsky, 10**

ravaged by fire. She takes karate lessons three days a week, serves as her school's student-council president and captain of the safety patrol, reports for a TV kids' show and has helped launch a school newspaper. She also founded an environmental committee to clean up the neighborhood. "Lisa," says her mother, "doesn't like having 'downtime.'"

Lisa's drive was shaped largely by

Lisa's siblings: her two older brothers are highly accomplished students and athletes. Observing their triumphs while growing up only fueled her desire to match stride. "I want to do well,"

she says. "I feel like achieving something." In fact, Lisa can't wait to become an official adult. "It's hard being a kid," she complains, arching her brows. "You can't have your own money. You can't have your own house. You always have to ask your parents before you go and do anything." For all her yearnings for independence, Lisa regards the Molofsky home (her mother is a school nurse, her father a health-center manager) as a kind of refuge from her turbocharged existence. "When I'm at school, I'm really in control of myself. But when I get home I'm so tired I don't really care how I act. I know whatever I do my parents are not going to drop me because they're my parents."

The only other moments that approximate downtime in Lisa's life come in a stand of woods near her home. She likes to go there alone—to talk to the plants and the trees and, for once, to confront being Lisa. "There's no one to bother you," she says, her voice suddenly slow. "You can just stand there and it's real quiet. I guess it gives me a chance to think."

She does not mention the word "play."

STEVE LEVIN in Austin with  
HARRY F. WATERS

*'When I get older, I can try to change things. I just want it to be a perfect world.'*

Child Development. "With infants, it's how soon can they go to day care so the parents can go to work. With 8- or 9-year-olds, it's how soon can they come home alone? It's all designed to make the participation of adults in the work force easier."

Garbarino sees childhood besieged on three fronts: sexual, economic and political. The first is . . . well, everyone knows what it is. Any 10-year-old with a remote control now has access to depictions of concupiscence beyond the imagination of King Farouk. Half of all children

*Among a group of third graders, the chief topic was abduction*

or 16, says Holly Shaw, an expert on adolescent trauma at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, they're sick of sex. "There's nothing

spend part of their lives with single parents, forcing them into the uncomfortable role of seeing their parents as sexual actors, people who date, romance and change partners. This is not always as cute in life as it is made out to be in "Mrs. Doubtfire." The absence of parents from the home has greatly facilitated the sexual self-expression of children too young to drive. By the time they're 15

sadder than an adolescent saying that's all we do, we don't talk anymore."

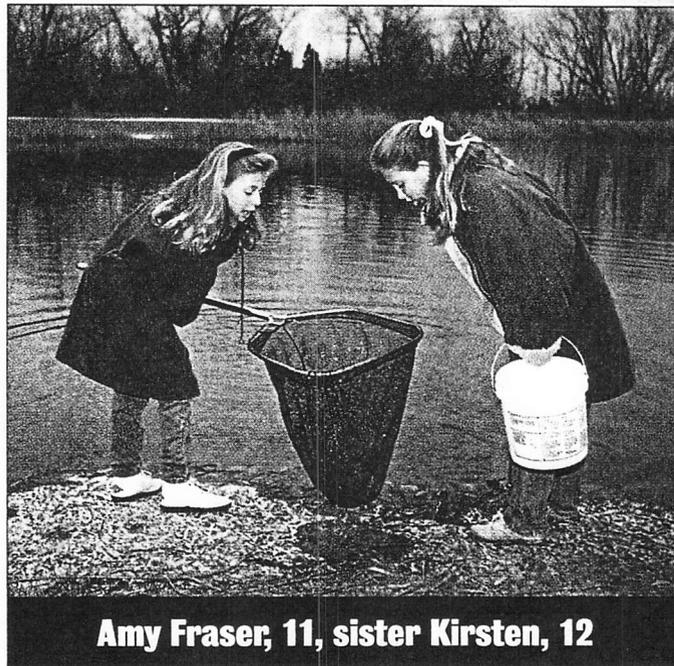
The second way in which society afflicts childhood is the relentless push for children to consume what adults want to sell them. Kids once collected baseball cards out of hero worship and bought toys to play with; today a book called "Kiplinger's Money-Smart Kids" recommends them as collectibles with the potential to appreciate. There is nothing new in greed, of course, but before there was television to inflame it, children's frame of reference was limited to neighbors who were probably in roughly the same economic bracket. "Now," Garbarino says, "you're competing with the

## Never Talk to Strangers—And Watch Out for Nice Guys, Too

**O**NE DAY LAST FALL, 11-year-old Amy Fraser and a friend went fishing at Willow Pond, a small park surrounded by big houses with broad lawns, a block from her home in suburban Willowbrook, Ill. A stranger drove up, watched the girls bait their hooks and cast their lines, then got out of his car and walked to the water's edge. That was all it took. "We were scared and we just ran," recalls Amy. "I was upset we had to leave but I knew it was the right thing to do."

And that's all there is to the story: nothing happened to Amy or her friend, and only the stranger knows just what he was up to. The point is that nowadays, even in Willowbrook, to run like hell from a suspicious stranger is the right thing for a kid to do. Amy and her 12-year-old sister, Kirsten, aren't allowed to play in their own front yard without a parent around. They recently began baby-sitting in the neighborhood—after a course from the local police on how to lock up, how to answer the phone without letting it slip that the grown-ups are out, how to get help. Their parents, Mark and Nancy Fraser, teach them how to fend off sexual assault, how not to get abducted and to hit the dirt at the sound of gunfire. "We're constantly reminding them what to do and what not to do," says Nancy. "They don't have a chance to be kids."

Have the Frasers just been watching



**Amy Fraser, 11, sister Kirsten, 12**

too much tabloid TV and making their children neurotic in the process? If only. Willowbrook, a sprawl of spacious, leafy subdivisions 20 miles from Chicago, used to be considered ideal for kids: close enough to the city for field trips, far enough away for safety. Yet last fall a 15-year-old student at the high school the Fraser girls will attend shot and killed a schoolmate in an apparent gang dispute. And a janitor at the girls' elementary school, who'd befriended pupils by giving out candy and showing them his trained pigeons, was arrested a couple

*'We talk about the now because we don't want to think about the future'*

of years ago in Chicago for aggravated sexual assault on a minor. "He was a nice guy, and all of a sudden he does something very bad," says Kirsten. "That makes me suspicious of nice people."

Families in inner-city Chicago would gladly swap woes with folks in Willowbrook. But to the Frasers, the loss of suburban innocence comes hard. "I get so angry," says Nancy. "They can't experience the stuff I did. They can't go out and play flashlight tag, can't walk alone for hours. They're not free to play like children." Kirsten, in turn, chafes at going to the mall under parental escort. "I wanted more freedom," she says, "but I couldn't have it because of the things that could happen."

Amy and Kirsten prefer to talk about their cheerleading squad, their swim team or Mariah Carey and En Vogue. Enough's enough: in school, they get videos on AIDS ("When I date or something," says Kirsten, "I'm afraid of what will happen") and discuss last fall's shooting; at home, the possibility of attack or abduction seems to circumscribe their every move. "We talk about the now because we don't want to think about the problems we'll have in the future," says Amy. "We're afraid of the guns, the shootings, the gangs and dying. If it's so bad

now, it's going to spread out in the future." This isn't the way their parents' generation grew up feeling about the future—but it's the way many parents feel today. And little pitchers have big ears.

STANLEY HOLMES in Willowbrook, with DAVID GATES

whole country. You're comparing yourself to people at the top of the ladder. People who didn't feel poor are forced to see themselves that way."

And the third is concerned with security. This can encompass both safety and the broader right of children to wait until adulthood to confront some of the unpleasant truths of the world. Television, as social critic Neil Postman points out, makes accessible to children the secrets that adults once preferred to keep to themselves: that the world is a dangerous place, that politicians lie, and most breakfast cereals either taste good or are good for you, but not both. Children can no longer retreat to a kid-size world in which no danger loomed bigger than the schoolyard bully. The shock of the Polly Klaas case—that a stranger could invade a house full of children, abduct and murder one—was compounded by accounts of how the police helpfully dug the kidnapper's car out of a ditch. "I sometimes wonder if they can really do their job," says Jablon's son Alex Silver, 14. He has reason to be concerned; he was mugged at knifepoint in Harvard Square a few years ago.

Visiting a class of third graders in a middle-class Chicago suburb recently, Garbarino discovered that the leading topic of concern was kidnapping. They knew all about Polly Klaas and the two English boys who murdered a 2-year-old. Virtually every one of them knew someone in the family or neighborhood with a gun. And of these 8-year-olds, their little heads stuffed with the details of crimes so horrible they would appall a Barbary pirate, how many regularly came home to an empty house? Garbarino asked for a show of hands: a third of the class.

It gets dark early in the Midwest this time of year. Long before many parents are home from work, the shadows creep up the walls and gather in the corners, while on the carpet a little figure sprawls in the glow emanating from an anchorman's tan. There's been a murder in the Loop, a fire in a nightclub, an indictment of another priest. Red and blue lights swirl in urgent pinwheels as the ambulances howl down the dark streets. And one more crime that never gets reported, because there's no one to arrest. Who killed childhood? We all did.

With MICHELE INGRASSIA and ALDEN COHEN in New York, DEBRA ROSENBERG in Boston, JEANNE GORDON in Los Angeles and bureau reports

## White B-Boys in the Burbs, or, Up Against the Mall

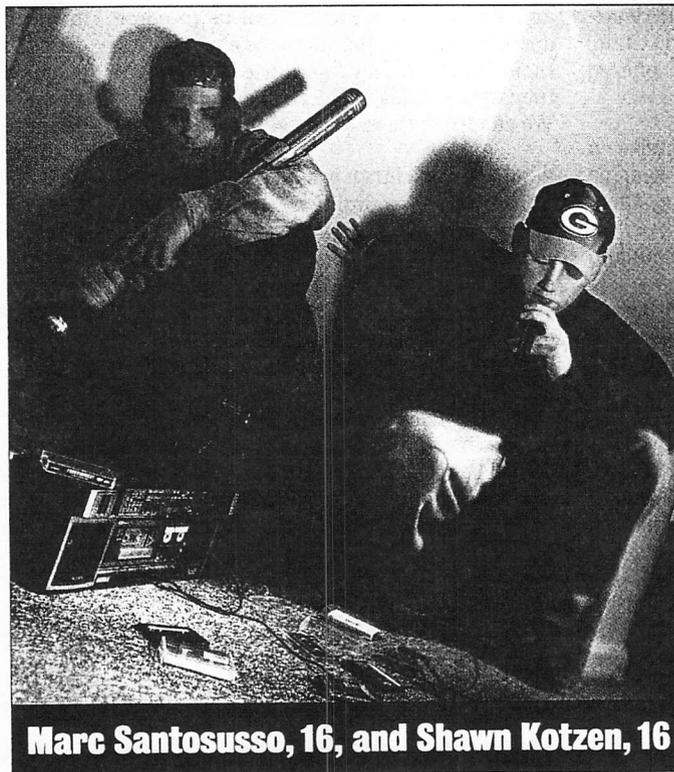
**A**T STRATH HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL in genteel, mostly white Wallingford, Pa., they call Marc Santosusso and Shawn Kotzen "wiggers"—white kids with black attitude. The two don't hang out with the school's few black kids (Strath Haven is 90 percent white), who think they're ripping off black styles—or so Marc and Shawn imagine. But they listen to rap on Power 99 from nearby Philadelphia, and as Q-Marc and JuV they're rappers too: Shawn dubs beats from the stereo he got as a bar mitzvah gift onto the family

since the eighth grade but admits, "There's not much to write about when you live in the suburbs. You listen to these songs, they're like: 'I shot this guy in the street because he tried to rob me,' whatever. That never happens to me. It never will." They spend time at the video arcade playing Mortal Kombat II ("It's kind of controversial," Shawn explains. "It's the video where you crush people's heads off and rip out people's hearts"), but neither has even been in a fistfight since grade school. In Wallingford, the tough kids are the ones who smoke cigarettes, dip Skoal or drink beer in the littered woods behind the school, where the same spent condom has lain for three years. "I got a condom in like eighth grade," says Shawn. "It expired in October."

The dream of being Q-Marc and JuV doesn't come cheap. They both took jobs at Granite Run Mall partly to be able to keep buying the proper clothes: the overpromoted, overpriced baggy jeans, sweat shirts and footgear that go with Marc's earrings and Shawn's modified fade. "I used to buy Nikes," says Shawn, "but they got expensive so I started buying Adidas." "We used to wear a lot of Cross Colours," adds Marc. "Now instead of \$60 shirts I'm buying \$30 shirts." Shawn works at Waldenbooks; Marc put in up to 30 hours a week at Burger King until just before Christmas, when he "got smart with the boss" and was fired. (Their grades have suffered, though Shawn admits he also "slacked off majorly this quarter.") It's a drearily apt emblem of what suburban teen culture offers. On the one hand, the climate-controlled drudgery of the mall; on the other, the simulated thrills of gangsta rap and Mortal Kombat. As Marc says of himself and Shawn, "We're different. But the same."

PATRICK ROGERS in Wallingford, Pa., with DAVID GATES

*"There's not much to rap about in the suburbs. Rappers say 'I shot this guy.' That never happens to me."*



**Marc Santosusso, 16, and Shawn Kotzen, 16**

boombox. So far they've performed only in Shawn's room—though they almost played a school talent show. "It was a little bit of stage fright and a little bit of, like, we kind of signed up too late and didn't have our stuff together," says Shawn.

This would be a *folie à deux* right out of "Wayne's World" if Marc and Shawn, both 16, didn't also have glimmerings of an undeluded sense of where and who they really are. Shawn has written raps