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DR. SPOCK babies, 'the book' and the bomb







Roughhousing with his grandsons during a recent family gathering, Dr. Spock gives Peter, 5, a boost while Danny, 7, grins his delight.

# 'NOT THE DR. SPOCK!'

*Millions of mothers have thanked heaven for his book on baby care, but few ever thought of Benjamin Spock as a real person until he began speaking out against the Vietnam war.*

By Robert K. Massie

**T**racing elaborate curves on the ice with his skate blades, Dr. Benjamin Spock swooped across the big indoor rink. Like an aging Hans Brinker, he floated along to the blare of tango music from an electric organ, guiding his partner in the steps of the Gold Dances, the highest level of skill recognized among skaters. "When I dance with my teacher," he said later, "I think I'm pretty good. But when I try these steps with anyone else, I see how bad I really am."

Three times a week Dr. Spock—friend to mothers and babies in 29 languages, Olympic carman, dauntless mariner, newly controversial political figure and, possibly, future candidate for the U.S. Senate from Ohio—takes a lunch-hour lesson at the Cleveland Skating Club. "I just can't function without getting some exercise," he says.

At 63, Dr. Spock is a blue-eyed Dutchman with an angular six-foot, four-inch frame and a pleasant, bony face topped by a sparse white crew cut. To most American women his name is as well known as that of the President of the United States. This extraordinary fame rests on a single remarkable book, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. Known to everyone else as "Dr. Spock," and to Spock himself simply as "the book," *Baby and Child Care* has sold more than 19 million copies since its first appearance, in 1946. Only the Bible and Shakespeare have done better. Twenty years later, Dr. Spock's following among mothers remains vast and fiercely devoted.

A whole generation of mothers blessed him for the book's index, which contains such commonsensical listings as *Nose, objects in, Potato, putting on, and Blue jelling after childbirth*. "If Dr. Spock ran for President," said one young mother, not caring where he stands on anything except babies, "he'd get one vote in every family."

Dr. Spock has never considered running for President, but in recent years he has felt obliged to speak out on matters of national policy. Before the signing of the Test Ban Treaty, he objected vociferously to test explosions of nuclear bombs. Lately he has been arguing against U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

To an extent, the politicians themselves are responsible for Spock's appearance in the political arena. In 1960 John F. Kennedy's youthful campaign managers decided that there was a "Mothers' vote" which they could reach through Dr. Spock. "We felt that a lot of ladies in the United States, seeing Ben Spock and Jack together, might be persuaded to vote for Jack," said one of them.

"Dr. Spock is for my husband," said Jacqueline Kennedy, "and I am for Dr. Spock." In 1964 Dr. Spock campaigned vigorously in person and on television for Lyndon Johnson. After one of Dr. Spock's TV appearances, he says, "The President called me up on the phone, saying how deeply he appreciated my support and how much he hoped he would be worthy of my trust." After the elec-

tion Dr. Spock tried several times to see the President, to talk about peace. "The most we ever got back," says Dr. Spock, "was a letter from McGeorge Bundy, saying that the President was too busy and, besides, we were wrong."

The basic reason for Dr. Spock's political activities, however, has been his own strongly personal feeling that, in the nuclear era, "someone must speak for children and babies as well as parents." The direct link between babies, milk, and the danger of radioactive contamination from atomic testing drew Dr. Spock into the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. SANE's membership includes actors Steve Allen and Robert Ryan, editor Norman Cousins, and old socialist Norman Thomas, but its most widely admired member is Dr. Spock. Not surprisingly, he is now co-chairman of the organization (along with Professor H. Stuart Hughes of Harvard).

SANE does not advocate wholesale U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, but does urge negotiations—which, it feels, would necessarily include the Viet Cong. "Because of the war in Vietnam," Dr. Spock argues, "the physical threat to our children from nuclear annihilation is a thousand times greater than all the dangers from the usual children's diseases and accidents combined. I think it's my job to tell parents about these new dangers."



Dr. Spock is a splendid baby impersonator. Lecturing at Western Reserve Medical School, in Cleveland, Ohio, he yells, glares and waves his arms to act out a baby's needs and emotions. Above, he reveals an unsatisfied need to suck; above right, he complains that mother has pushed the feeding spoon up against the roof of his mouth; at right, he tries to free himself from his mother's arms.

He tours the country at his own expense, giving speeches with titles like "Raising Our Children in a Cold War Age," which brings the crowd to hear about babies and sends them home having heard about peace. He also holds press conferences and gives radio and television interviews.

"The war in Vietnam," he told a TV audience recently, "is militarily hopeless, morally wrong, and politically self-defeating. It is a very dangerous war for the United States. If we are not careful, we are going to escalate ourselves right off the face of the earth."

For speaking out so strongly, Dr. Spock has been called foolish, ignorant—even unpatriotic.



*Furious at Spock  
for his political views,  
one mother wrote:*

*'I just tore your book apart  
with my bare hands.'*

"I certainly am not unpatriotic," he retorts. "I have always believed in standing up to aggression. But in Vietnam we are not standing up to aggression; we provoked it by trying to establish a sphere of influence on the other side of the world."

An Indiana doctor recently wrote the American Medical Association, asking that Spock be expelled because he was guilty of treason. The A.M.A. replied that Dr. Spock's political views were his private affair. Angry mothers have written, "I thought I could trust you . . . I'm never going to believe another word you write," or even, "I have just torn your book apart with my bare hands." Dr. Spock thinks he understands how these letter writers feel. "If I had admired somebody professionally and then found out he was a Fascist, I'd probably change my view of him," he says.

Curiously, although his peace work has made some Americans mad, it has also made Dr. Spock much better known. Now that he is appearing regularly on television and in the press, he is a celebrity. "Airline stewardesses say 'Not the Dr. Spock!' as they check my name on the passenger list," he says. "Hotel telephone operators say 'Are you the Dr. Spock?' when I call down to leave my name to be awakened in the morning."

Dr. Spock's friends in the peace movement, impressed by his vast popularity, have begun to talk about his seeking political office; some speak urgently of having him run for the Senate. Such talk disturbs Mrs. Spock, a quiet, attractive woman who has been trying for 39 years to get her husband to slow down. "Ben is sweet and outgoing in so many ways," says Jane Cheney Spock, "but on some things he is stubborn. He drives himself too hard." She has begged him not to take on anything else when he retires from the faculty of Western Reserve University two years from now.

At a time when movie stars, football coaches and astronauts have run for the Senate, however, the idea of Pediatrician Benjamin Spock's becoming Senator Benjamin Spock seems only slightly bizarre. Dr. Spock himself jooch-poochs the idea, though he keeps bringing it up. "The peace movement must be represented in politics," he says. Running on a peace platform, even to certain defeat, has a considerable appeal for Dr. Spock. "It might be the very best way to bring a lot of publicity to my views on peace," he says.

Benjamin McLane Spock was born into an ultraconservative family in New Haven, Conn. His father, whose Hudson-River-Dutch ancestors had changed their name from Spaak, was general counsel for the New Haven railroad. Dr. Spock's mother was a strong-minded woman with inflexible ideas about raising children, and "Genny," the eldest of the six, served many hours at her elbow holding the bottles and changing the diapers of his five Spock siblings. "There is a chance," he admits with a grin, "that my relaxed philosophy on child care had something to do with my own stern upbringing."

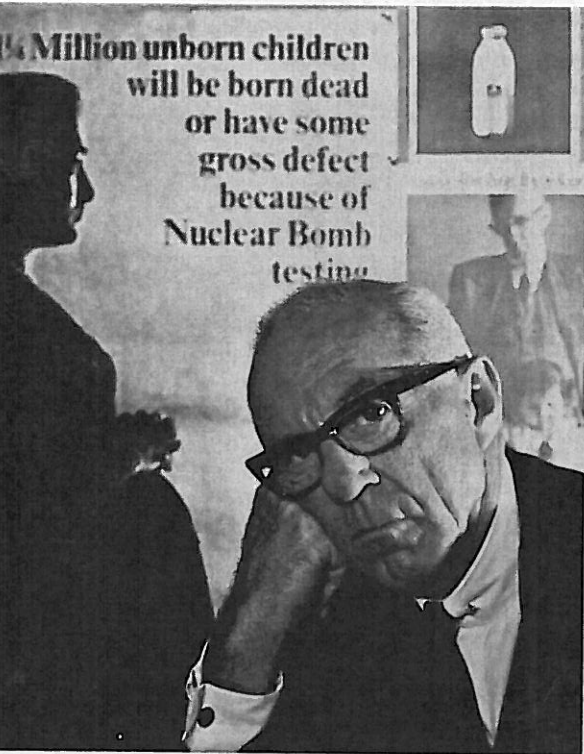
At Andover and Yale, Benjamin Spock joined good clubs and sped campus leaders. "I remember watching Stuart Symington—he was an upper-classman then—and marveling how smooth he was, what a man of the world!" By going out for crew, Dr. Spock became a campus personage himself. His long, lanky body and enormous hands were perfect for rowing, and in 1924, as a member of a superb Yale varsity, he helped pull his boat to an Olympic victory on the Seine.

It was at a party after a boat race against Harvard that Benjamin Spock, brown hair slicked down and parted in the middle, met 17-year-old Jane Cheney, who was about to enter Bryn Mawr. They walked in the moonlight in a garden gazebo, and the following night, at 19, he proposed.

Their wedding, four years later, made Benjamin Spock the only married man at Yale Medical School. In college Dr. Spock had thought of becoming an architect, but he changed his mind after a summer spent working in a crippled-children's home near Hartford. "I watched the orthopedic surgeon working with the children who had had polio," Dr. Spock remembers. "I realized how much he was helping them and I decided that I wanted to be a doctor."

After Spock's marriage the proximity of his parents made New Haven seem overly confining, and he transferred to Columbia University Medical School in New York City. The young couple lived on West 170th Street in a one-room basement apartment with their bed hidden behind a

*The direct link between babies, milk and the danger of radioactive contamination impelled Dr. Spock to enter the political arena and speak out against nuclear testing.*



*'I'll spend the rest of  
my life working for peace.'*

curtain. To save money, Jane Spock did all the laundry. "Ben's so wonderful," she told her friends. "He only expects me to iron the parts of his shirts that show."

In 1933 Benjamin Spock, M.D., went into private practice as a pediatrician in New York City. He rented space in an obstetrician's office and slaved for two years before his income exceeded his expenses. "Nothing was ever too much trouble for Ben," recalls a colleague of those early days. "Once I saw him spend twenty minutes teaching a young mother how to read a thermometer. There was another woman who came to the clinic who drove the rest of us crazy because she yak-yakked on and on about her child. But Ben would sit patiently and let her spill out everything on her mind. He said, 'I like them to talk. It helps both of us.'"

"All the time I was in practice," says Dr. Spock, "I kept seeing things from the other's point of view. I remembered their questions and my answers, and later I went back and asked the moth-

ers how my suggestions had worked. This way I built up quite a body of practical knowledge. When I sat down to write 'the book,' I wrote all 526 pages in the first edition without consulting anything. It all came out of my head."

Today Dr. Spock remembers with great fondness his "twenty wonderful years in New York." "The city was full of good conversation," he says. "We used to go to dinner parties and argue passionately about the Spanish Civil War. Nobody cared whether you agreed with them or not." Both of Dr. Spock's children were born in New York City. Michael, now 33, is the director of the Boston Children's Museum, and the father of Dr. Spock's grandsons, Danny, 7, and Peter, 5. John Spock, 22, is a senior at Harvard and plans to become an architect. Both Spock children were raised in the relaxed way their father favored: being allowed at parties to wander around and walk off with the glasses, or to go into the park and sit down in the middle of mud puddles.

In 1943, on an Adirondack vacation, Dr. Spock began writing "the book." He wrote for a year while still in private practice, finishing his house calls at 9 P.M. and coming home to write until 1 A.M. He continued writing for two more years as a Navy lieutenant commander, while he was running a psychiatric ward at St. Albans Naval Hospital in Queens and living at home. This convenient existence came to an end in 1945, when Dr. Spock was assigned to participate in the forthcoming invasion of Japan. Sent to California for amphibious training, he took "the book" complete except for revisions and index, along with him. In the interest of speed, his publishers, Pocket Books, offered the services of a professional indexer, but Dr. Spock refused.

"I think I know how mothers will look things up," he said. The result: writing for mothers holding a screaming, or choking, or feverish child in one hand and "the book" in the other, was pieced together in seven days on a troop train rambing across the continent. He did the revising in San Bruno, going every night for a month to the base telephone center, hunching into a booth surrounded by sailors, and intoning to Jane in New York: "Page so-and-so, line so-and-so, presently reads . . . change to read . . ." The war ended before Dr. Spock went to the Pacific, but he stayed in the Navy until May 1946. That was the month "the book" came out.

"You know more than mothers will do," was its famous opening line. "Don't be overawed by what the experts say," the first page continued.

"We know for a fact that the natural loving care that kindly parents give their children is a hundred times more valuable." This page was followed by 525 others, all offering reassurance, common sense and soothing touches of humor along with sound medical advice. "It's disturbing to a mother to have her baby take up the habit of banging his head," writes Dr. Spock in a typical passage. "It seems so senseless and painful that it makes her doubt if he's really bright, after all. She wonders if the repeated blows can injure his brain. Even if she doesn't have these worries, she finds it nerve-racking to sit in the next room and listen to the steady thud, thud, thud." The baby, Dr. Spock goes on, will not hurt himself, is not stupid, and is simply releasing tension and developing his sense of rhythm. As antidotes, he suggests cuddling the child and padding the crib.

"The book" caught the post-war baby boom and became an instant success. Mothers who had been through the war were eager for the more flexible, spontaneous philosophy of child-rearing advocated by Spock. They loved his chatty style and reassuring approach. "I feel as if you were

talking just to me," one wrote. "Other books make me feel that I'm always about to make some terrible mistake with my baby. You make me feel as if you thought I was a sensible person."

"The books" popularity apparently is permanent. Other child-care books have appeared in the past 20 years, of course, but none has sold anything like as many copies as Dr. Spock's. There are pediatricians who grumble that Dr. Spock is merely a "populizer" in the field of pediatrics, but the majority regard his book as enormously useful. "If mothers would just believe what Spock says and not feel they have to have it confirmed by me," says one weary pediatrician.

Medically "the book" is kept up-to-date by constant small revisions. In 1957 Dr. Spock brought out a new edition, thoroughly revised. In it, he somewhat altered his earlier philosophy, pointing out that, at the time of the first edition, the general attitude toward child care had been fairly strict and inflexible. "Since then," he wrote in the new edition, "a great change of attitude has occurred, and nowadays there seems to be more chance of a conscientious parent's getting into trouble with permissiveness than with strictness."

*Baby and Child Care* has gone through 150 printings, sells from 750,000 to 1,000,000 copies a year, and with each copy sold putting three cents in Dr. Spock's pocket, earning him annual royalties of as much as \$30,000. His income from "the book," from a monthly column he writes for *Redbook*, and from his teaching salary, amounts to more than \$80,000 a year. This is a sum which permits the Spocks to live in substantial comfort, in an old, gray, stucco house located on a shady street in a quiet, tree-lined, rosy old house. The living room is carpeted in beige, furnished and draped in yellow and gold, with red and orange abstract paintings hung from pale-lemon walls. In a corner, behind a high stool, stands the old drafting table on which "the book" was written.

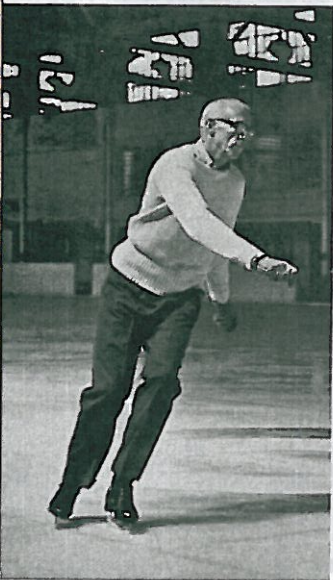
Dr. Spock rises early and always stays up, in vigorous motion, until after midnight—as a reporter recently discovered when the Spocks invited him to stay with them because every hotel in Cleveland was full that week. Every morning at seven, Dr. Spock, in suit with vest, sits down to a breakfast of freshly squeezed orange juice, hot cereal, toast with marmalade, and milk.

Shortly before eight Dr. Spock kisses his wife good-bye and sets out for the office at the wheel of an ancient green Rambler. He has been told that Cleveland Heights, where he lives, is the last ridge of the Allegheny Mountains, while Cleveland, where he works, rests on the edge of the Great Plains. It pleases him to think that every morning, in his 10-minute drive to work, "I travel from the Alleghenies to the Great Plains."

Western Reserve Medical School and University Hospitals are housed in an immense and ugly pile of yellow brick surrounded by parking lots. Professionally Dr. Spock is a hybrid at Western Reserve. As Professor of Child Development, he has "one foot in pediatrics and one foot in child psychiatry." "Pediatrics," he explains, "is children's diseases, and I haven't actually treated children's diseases since my book was published. If I were to move tomorrow and change my name and open an office as a pediatrician, I'd probably starve."

On the other hand, although he did his residency in psychiatry and has had five years of psychoanalytic training, Dr. Spock is not a psychiatrist. "I'm too general to be a good psychiatrist," he says. "I'm interested in the general behavior of all children rather than the behavior of a specific child, as a psychiatrist must be." His role, he feels, has been to bridge the gap between psychiatry and pediatrics, drawing knowledge from both into a general field of child care, child behavior and child development.

Dr. Spock's duties at Western Reserve are



Three days a week, Dr. Spock polishes up his technique on ice in a teach-hour visit to the Cleveland Skating Club.





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## NOT THE DR. SPOCK!

tailored to his interests. He lectures to undergraduates on child development, gives a course in child care to first-year medical students, and holds seminars with pediatric and psychiatric residents. His medical-school lectures are given at 8:10 A.M. in a large amphitheater with tiers of seats rising almost to the ceiling. Dr. Spock prepares for them by slipping into a long white doctor's coat. "I don't really need this," he says. "But these are first-year students, and it helps provide the proper atmosphere." Then, his coat billowing out behind him like a sail, he strides rapidly through basement tunnels crowded with students, workmen, and orderlies pushing carts of dirty linen. Rounding corners in full stride, overtaking people, nodding when they nod to him, his head almost brushing the padded steam pipes along the ceiling, he leaps up a flight of stairs and bursts into the amphitheater ready to begin his lecture.

Dr. Spock is a splendid baby impersonator. Pacing back and forth before a class, yawning his long arms, glaring red-faced, veiling hoarsely, he acts out the needs and emotions of his small constituents. His compassion for children glows in the quieter moments of his talks with young doctors in residence. Leaning back in his chair, he clasps his hands behind his head and stretches his long legs so that his shoes protrude from under the front of his desk. Explaining the agony which divorce creates for children, he describes children desperately begging their quarreling parents to come back together. Young children, he says, must idealize their parents. "To children left in orphanages, the mother is always a beautiful lady in a white dress and the father a handsome movie-star hero, even though you know and they know that both the parents were perfectly dreadful."

Like most men, Dr. Spock, sitting at his desk during the long months of the winter, dreams of other things. "All the time I'm working," he says. "I'm thinking about sailing." In recent years the Spocks have left Cleveland during the Christmas holidays to fly to the Virgin Islands and charter a sailboat. This winter Dr. Spock added a second mid-winter Caribbean cruise in February.

Every July the Spocks head for Falmouth, Mass., where their own 23-foot sloop *Turtle* is kept. Dressed in pale-blue slickers, they head for the green islands off the coast of Maine. For two months they rise before dawn, hoist anchor at first light, and sail until late afternoon. At night, while Mrs. Spock cooks dinner, Dr. Spock sets the table, and, afterward, washes the dishes. In their bunks, they sit up and read until midnight.

Dr. Spock has suffered more than his share of nautical mishaps. The *Turtle* has been dismasted at sea three times, and a few years ago he and his son John almost drowned in Copenhagen harbor when their small sailboat capsized at dusk a mile from shore. Realizing that they were drifting out to sea, they decided to swim for shore, but luckily an old fisherman happened along in a skiff and picked them up. Dr. Spock gently shrugs off his wife's distress about these incidents. "Part of the difference between men and women is their reaction to danger," he says. "Men need a bit of danger now

and then as a challenge, a spur. Women are more realistic, more sensible. They think in terms of security."

On winter evenings when he is not traveling for SANE, Dr. Spock dines by candlelight at home with his wife. After dinner the Spocks occasionally go to the symphony or to see a European film. Infrequently Dr. Spock plops down on a couch to read a magazine or a book. "I always tell myself I'm just stealing a book," he says. What he should be doing, he feels, is writing.

The place he writes in best is his living room, with his long legs wrapped around the legs of his writing stool, a pad of yellow legal paper open before him on his drafting desk and a symphony or an album of folk songs on the phonograph. He is saddened by the fact that "while I can get up to four thousand dollars for even a warmed-over article on baby care, nobody will buy an article on peace. I sent one to *Look*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *The Reporter*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, and they all sent it right back."

He is now working on an ambitious new book tentatively titled *The Nature of Man*, which will deal with "the whole broad question of what man is on the earth for." "I've written about all I can for parents, and there's not much more I can say about children," says Dr. Spock. "But in one way or another I'll spend the rest of my life working for peace and youth. Even if we get peace in Vietnam, there still will be no security in the world. Our salvation will be over youth."

Two years from now, when he retires from the faculty at Western Reserve, Dr. Spock plans major changes in his way of life. If he decides to run for the Senate in 1968, he will remain in Ohio by Sen. Frank Lausche, or, not, he may move to New York, where many of his friends still live, or to Boston, where he can be near his sons, Michael and John, their wives, Judy and Kendall—and his two grandsons.

Raising the grandchildren of the Dr. Spock might seem a fairly terrifying task, but Judy Spock has not found it so. She follows "the book"—because she happens to agree with it. "My mother, who is a psychologist, puts her views on children to me much more often than Ben does," she says. (All the Spocks, including the boys, call Dr. Spock "Ben," which is the way he likes it.)

At a recent family gathering, three generations of Spocks were finishing lunch in a Boston restaurant, when the oldest and youngest members of the clan put their heads together to consider the problem of dessert.

"What about sherbet?" asked Dr. Spock.

"Yes, Sherbet," five-year-old Peter Spock agreed.

"What flavor?" Dr. Spock asked.

"No flavor," said Peter Spock. "Just plain sherbet."

"But it's got to have a flavor," said Dr. Spock. "It's got to be lemon or raspberry or something like that."

"Plain sherbet. Ben. Plain sherbet," Peter Spock insisted.

In the end he accepted a dish of lemon sherbet, though Dr. Spock never did convince him that it wouldn't be better plain. But then, as "the book" says, discussing the child from three to six, "He is a real person with ideas of his own."