

Post Daily Magazine

Sons of the Famous

ARTICLE II
By JERRY TALLMER

SPOCK, Benjamin (McLane), physician, educator, author; born New Haven, Conn., 1928; U.S. Navy, 1944-46; consultant in pediatric psychiatry, N. Y. C. Health Dept., 1947-47; Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn., 1948-51; Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1951-55; Western Reserve Univ., Cleveland, 1955-56; author Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care (1946); Dr. Spock Talks With Mothers (1961); married Jane Cleveland Conner, June 22, 1957; children Michael (born Jan. 25, 1953), John Cheney (born April 21, 1944).

THE FIRST junior member of the Museum of Modern Art was a boy named Michael Spock. He was then about 8. Today, a tall and very handsome young man of 30, he sits in his own museum in Boston's Jamaica Plains suburb and remembers: "The Modern Museum in those days had a great exhibition of American Indian art. They even had craftsmen working on things right before your eyes."

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Since last November, Michael Spock has been in Boston as director of The Children's Museum. He and his wife Judy and their two sons—Daniel, 4, and Peter, 2—live 10 minutes away by car in Cambridge, Mass., "in our graduate-student digs," the top of a



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two-family house. "We're trying to find something we can afford," he says, and to decide whether it should be urban or suburban. They are raising the children in their own way, which is not the way of the children's grandparents—for instance in matters of deportment at table. Michael and Judy are far more relaxed about it than Michael's father was when Michael was a boy.

And do they read Dr. Spock? "Oh, sure," says Michael. "You have to. To find out what the ear-aches mean or if it's mumps. I've never read it all the way through, of course. I guess Judy has."

Some newspaper once said that Michael and his brother John, who is 11 years younger, had not both been raised in quite the same manner—John a little more "permissively" than his older brother.

Michael Spock says: "I don't know. We were both raised by my mother and father. Maybe the superficials changed, maybe I was spanked a couple of times and my brother not spanked, though I think he was. What counts are the personalities, and both my mother and father are strong personalities. I went to progressive school and all that, permissively if you like, but within very clear limits. There was," he says, the amusement coming into his eyes, "little overt control but plenty of manipulation. As a matter of fact, I felt a great deal more freedom when we

moved to Rochester, Minn., and I went to public school—where it was all out in the open, you against the teachers."

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JOHN SPOCK, WHO AT 19 IS JUST AS TALL AS his brother and presumably, beneath the beard he's been sprouting, just as good-looking, says: "Probably I got my bottle when I wanted it and he was fed on schedule, that sort of thing. But for the rest, my father is a very conscientious man who knows what he wants done with his child, and does it." John is a freshman at Harvard College. It was his own choice. His father went to Yale.

"Everything he told me about Harvard and everything he told me about Yale," says John, "made me think Harvard was the place to be. I even think he was subconsciously trying to sell me on Harvard."

Michael did something even more outlandish. Michael went to Antioch, an exceedingly progressive college in Yellow Springs, Ohio. "I was a good swimmer and all set to go to Yale, where my father went, and where swimming was a big thing, when I took a quick trip down to Antioch during a spring vacation and decided that was the place for me."

It took him eight years to graduate.

"I was originally in the class of 1955, and went in and out of school three times. Antioch has a famous work-study system—half year study, half year work—but that is not to be confused with what I did." He started as a pre-med major "because I guess the whole idea of medicine appealed to me," but he was quickly dissuaded away from it by one summer's work as an orderly in the Antioch hospital. "It was depressing. I suddenly realized you're only dealing with sick people. And then I guess I found out I didn't have that messianic stamina."

He made the "easy shift" to biology, "but the pressures of growing up were upon me—other colleges sort of phase you into this growth. Antioch just dumps you down, there's a tremendous rate of attrition there—and the only way I could handle it was by getting out." He quit school to work for a year as a cabinetmaker at a mill in Yellow Springs—"a town of 5,000, half college people, half southern Ohio primitives." He also married Judy Wood, an Antioch arts major. He returned to graduate in 1959, working besides as an exhibit designer for several small, "chaotic" Ohio museums.

"Then," says Michael Spock, "I thought that before giving up museums forever I would give it sort of one last try. That I would see if there weren't some chance of applying behavioral science and research techniques in such a way as to make some sense out of this chaos." He applied and was accepted at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he took statistics, research methodology, philosophy of education, psychology of learning, perception. "And there I found out that you could break the impasse."

What impasse?

"Well, just think back to your own museum experiences. The place is too big. Your feet hurt. There's always the temptation to see too much. If you're there with kids, you get fragmented every which way. There's no two-way communication, no feedback. I want a museum to do more than just display some objects. I want the exhibits designed on an intuitive level so that the objects say something. You often see this today in industrial exhibits, and certainly in films—but a museum has one advantage over books and films: it gives you information through direct experience with real objects and real places. It is the only medium where all the senses may be excited."

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"I think it's going to be fun," he said in that room the other day. He looked very much like a young man of distinction, in well-tailored charcoal flannel,

a white button-down shirt, a decorative but narrow tapestry tie in excellent taste, clasped to the shirt with a narrow silver bar.

"The question always comes up," he said, with that sort of detached irony which is his trademark, "whether I got interested in children's museums because of my father. The answer is no. It was purely fortuitous; this job just materialized and I took it. It's the one I've been waiting for. Of course the board here had to swallow all doubts about hiring a young person with little administrative experience. But I'm pleased and I guess they are."

At a downstairs desk in the museum sits Jean Rosette, 23, librarian and other things—a New York City girl married to a Harvard graduate student. By coincidence, her job at the museum started the same day as Michael Spock's. "I think he's an amazing combination," she said, "of a person who is both creative and precise." She talked of his first innovation, a big new exhibit now being prepared for the front hall.

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"Sure I get some kidding," said Spock, "about being the guy who has to raise Dr. Spock's grandchildren. But people are usually pretty good about it, and in all truth I think my mother has more to say about it now than my father does. But Judy and I have the last say. I think the whole business of child-rearing—and everything else—is mostly a matter of personal style. I'm very much in agreement with my father that it's the parent who's in control and has to decide what to do at any one time."

He feels that the most interesting thing about having your own children "is finding out they have entities of their own. So pretty soon you're interacting with them. Right now with my kids, it's cowboys. Unless it's cowboys, it's no good. I don't know where they get this. We have no TV. In all truth," said Michael Spock, "I think my brother John feels the pressure today more than I do."

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