

## ESCAPE FROM LIFE

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The correct Central Daylight Time is \_\_\_\_\_. A few minutes ago office workers in Chicago left their typewriters for coffee. In St. Louis industrial workers shut down their machines and took coffee. And even at the University of Southern Illinois remaining students closed their books and took a coffee break.

The Broadway musical of 1961, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, gives credit where credit is due in a song with these rather dynamic lyrics:

If I can't take my coffee break  
My coffee break, my coffee break  
Then something inside me dies.

Because this musical not only gave the theatre audience an inside look at the world of the dictaphone and water cooler, but a satirical picture of the American people, it was presented the New York Drama Critics award.

The coffee break is a custom peculiar only to the American people. Seldom will you find an office that does not take at least fifteen minutes in the morning and afternoon for coffee. One businessman said that it just makes good economic sense to let his staff have coffee because they work at a higher level of efficiency after returning to the job. Another executive snapped that he too had to let his employees have coffee because they needed this time to escape from the dreariness of life for a few moments. Statistics provide shocking evidence when they show that the American people spend enough on coffee each morning to pay the President of the United States and his cabinet salaries for one term of office. And why do Americans spend these dollars for the almighty coffee bean, because they need to escape from the dreariness of life for a few moments.

What has happened to the once symbolic dream of America? Americans will do anything to get away from it all. The streets of our cities are lined with cocktail lounges that provide an instant escape. Glaring neon signs spell out the appropriate names of the escape parlors. We can walk down a single block in one midwestern city and discover four bars offering the visitor with an I. D. card and a five-dollar bill: Shades of Joy, The Tropic, The Jet-A-Way, and the Bagdad. At the piano, an entertainer renders songs of forgetfulness such as "Younger Than Springtime," "Because We're Young," and "Young at Heart." The walls of the bars are lined with mirrors, and through the haze and smoke the fountain of youth is realized. The car payment, house mortgage, and the three irresponsible children at home are all forgotten. Escaping American can suck away at a double martini and a filter cigarette.

This sucking instinct is not a new habit, for we have been doing it since the crib. At the first cry of discomfort, good old mom simply gave us a pacifier. When modern baby cries, the twentieth-century mom simply plugs in the electronic pacifier and presto! Baby is gently buzzed to sleep.

The American people of today are still asleep in the crib. They refuse to face responsibility. At the first whine they stuff themselves with tobacco, bottles of tranquillizers, shots of liquor, and dishes of artificially sweetened food.

"What has happened to the American people?" William Faulkner asked us. "We dozed, and life has abandoned us." No longer can the loud, strong voices of Americans be heard saying, "We are unafraid, we are unafraid to face the future!" Instead we hear only what Faulkner calls "mouthsounds," empty words which have escaped all meaning whatsoever. The blunt facts of the matter are that we, as Americans, have gone soft. We are out of condition physically, mentally, and spiritually. Look at these current trends to see just how soft Americans really are. The American Medical Association warned that Americans were not physically ready for the Kennedy fifty-mile hike, and it would be dangerous for many of us to embark on such a sojourn. The Metropolitan Association of Psychology in New York said that 88% of New Yorkers were suffering from some type of emotional disturbance and were in need of help. In a survey of school children, each child was asked what thing was most important to him,



and the overwhelmingly popular answer was money. These are only a few of the examples that show us America is sleeping altogether too contentedly in a baby crib. If these trends should continue, Americans are in danger of losing their will to fight, to sacrifice, and even to exist. When we have lost the ability to live with ourselves, how can we ever hope to live with the people across the street; or even more important, the people across an ocean?

Just a week ago I was awakened by a friend wanting to know where one of our mutual friends was. We learned that he had left the campus leaving a note taped to his door saying that he could not think, that he could not study, and he could not stand school life anymore. The note went on to say that he would not be back. Sometime that evening my friend had lost the ability to face reality. He stayed away one night, and when the dawn came bringing with it reality, he returned to campus to face much embarrassment.

The next time you face a mirror, look! Now take a really good look. It's you isn't it. Go beyond that image you see in the mirror. What is important to that person in the mirror and what does he want from life? Then ask yourself the damning question, "Are you satisfied?" If we all take an honest look at ourselves, few of us will like what we see.

The first thing we can do to remold that image in the mirror is to become interested in the people around us. We must begin to understand more deeply our fellow man, perhaps even allow ourselves to grow excited about some project. Then, and only then, can we drop the curtain of pseudosphistication that directs us to play the game of life by playing it cool. The coming years are a time for self-awareness and, most important of all, a time for facing reality.

Men for years have hung out signs descriptive of their trades. Shoemakers, a giant shoe; jewelers, a watch; the barber, a candy-striped pole. Our trade as citizens of the sixties is generation-building. Let's look at the signs we are hanging out as symbols of our civilization. "If I can't take my coffee break," Shades of Joy, The tropic, Jet-A-Way, and the Thinking Man's Filter Cigarette.

We, as Americans, should look to the story of the famous athlete who was asked to give a speech at a small country church. The church was located in a poor rural area and there was no budget for outside speakers. The minister of the church told the athlete that he would be paid only what was received in the morning offering. The athlete was of a charitable nature and so he agreed to give the speech. He took his small son to the church with him. The speech was given and then the collection was taken. The athlete took a five-dollar bill from his pocket and placed it in the collection plate. As the athlete left the church, the minister apologized as he gave the athlete the five-dollar bill and said that it was all that had been received. The athlete's son was silent until they reached the car. Then he said to his father, "I saw you put that five-dollar bill into the collection plate, and then I saw you take it from the minister. You know something, Daddy, if you had given more you would have gotten more in return."

How true of Americans of this century! Only when we start giving of ourselves can we ever hope to reap the benefits of a responsible society that is capable of seeing its problems and providing a responsible solution. Then can we look that image in the mirror squarely in the eye and find pride in the American way of life.

General Douglas MacArthur said in his farewell speech to the Congress of the United States, "Old soldiers never die they just fade away." On this early spring afternoon, 1963, it is my plea, America, wake up! before we fade away.