

By MARILYN BATES

The back-to-school clothing sales are now underway. I remember the way it used to be; I would take the children shopping and they impatiently submitted to being fitted, shod and hairdressed, dreaming all the while of the Mickey Mouse sundae with a cherry on top that I promised them afterward. That was the way it used to be.

Some things never change,

though. I lured the kids into the car by taking them to Harry's Hamburger Heaven for lunch. Afterward I informed them, "Now we are going shopping."

"Really gross trick," my daughter muttered.

"Ratfink," my son growled. We drove to the shopping center and my son fled as soon as I parked the car. The last I saw of him he was running madly to flag down a departing bus, glancing

back in terror every few moments as if he were being pursued by the hound of the Baskervilles.

I seized my daughter's arm firmly and led her to the department store. I paused before a display of an attractive pant suit with a coordinating skirt and sweater.

She looked at it with distaste. "Really gross, everything matches and what do you think my friends would say if they saw me wearing a skirt?"

We passed the children's shoe department and I exclaimed in delight, "Just look at these saddle shoes. They're back in style again. Those were the days." I reminisced dreamily. "Saddle shoes, penny loafers, bubblegum, cherry rotes, standing in line at the Michigan Theater waiting to see Tommy Dorsey and Frank Sinatra."

"FRANK SINATRA," my daughter repeated in a shocked voice, "do you mean that you actually stood in line to see that old guy who's always on the late, late

show? Really, Mother, those gross songs, and he doesn't even play the guitar."

"There are still some things we can be grateful for," I murmured.

We came to the "This Is Where It's At" department. She dashed inside and I lost sight of her for a few minutes. When she reappeared she was carrying a pair of tattered looking jeans, guaranteed to have been washed 1,157 times and costing \$20, and two T-shirts. One bore the picture of Kung Fu on an orange and purple background, and the other was a glow-in-the-dark sea green with a picture of a big, white fish enjoying his dinner. Underneath were some letters.

"What's SWAJ?" I inquired.

"You're hopeless, Mother. Can't you see that it's 'JAWS' spelled backward. Which one do you like best?"

"That's an awfully hard decision to make."

I abandoned the slim hopes I held about this expedition being a success. "I have a few errands to do. I'll be back in a little while."

I BOUGHT some Excedrin #2, a copy of The War Years, a new book that tells how to co-exist with adolescents and a cup of coffee.

When I returned to the combat zone, I found my daughter in the Far Out Shoe Salon. She rushed up to me.

Alternatives proposed for better child care

One way to strengthen American families is to help them care for their own children, says a University of Nebraska community development specialist.

Speaking recently at Michigan State University, Marie Arnot stressed that families are the primary agents for making children human. She noted that while 45 percent of the nation's mothers work, institutionalized child care is still not the best alternative for all families.

"When a child's day care center is located near the place of the parent's employment, the parent can make arrangements to spend lunch time with the child," said Ms. Arnot. She suggested more flexible work schedules and a shorter work week would also enable parents to spend more time caring for their children.

"Another possibility," she said, "is for women to share child care responsibilities. For instance, one

woman could take the children in the morning, and another woman could care for them in the afternoon. This would give both women a chance to work half-days and make some money — and would still provide the children with good care."

ONE OF the problems parents face in America, said Ms. Arnot, is that most efforts focus on serving the child rather than the family. She advised planning activities that serve the entire family.

"We especially need more planning for kids aged 11-15," she said. These children haven't really been entrusted with much responsibility — nothing they do is really considered important. How about involving them with child care or some aspect of the parents' work? Would it be possible, for example, not only to expose children to what you do but to have them help you do it?"

"Mother, you were so right about the saddle shoes. Just look at these."

She thrust a pair of shoes at me. I guess they were saddle shoes. They had four inch heels, three inch platforms, imitation snake-skin laces and a decal on the toes autographed by Mick Jagger.

"Just dandy," I groaned, "now you can be taller than he is."

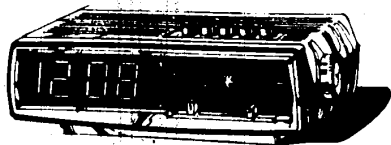
"Really, Mother, what a gross thing to say."

We bought the raggedy jeans and the T-shirts and the Mick Jagger saddle shoes. On the way home she clutched her packages to her and gloated. "Just wait till Nancy and Mary Sue see this. I'm glad you made me go shopping with you, Mother."

"That's all very well for you to say, but I think it was a really gross idea myself."

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