

"It's good, healthy common sense and will reinforce parents to do the obvious thing—I liked it immensely. Bravo!"

—T. Berry Brazelton

Spoiled



Rotten

**TODAY'S
CHILDREN
AND HOW TO
CHANGE THEM**

Fred G. Gosman



Spoiled Rotten

**TODAY'S
CHILDREN
AND HOW TO
CHANGE THEM**

Fred G. Gosman



WARNER BOOKS

A Time Warner Company

If you purchase this book without a cover you should be aware that this book may have been stolen property and reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher. In such case neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

Warner Books Edition

Copyright © 1990 by Fred Gosman
All rights reserved.

This Warner Books edition is published by arrangement with Villard Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

Warner Books, Inc., 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

 A Time Warner Company

Printed in the United States of America

First Warner Books Printing: September 1993

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gosman, Fred G.

Spoiled rotten / Fred G. Gosman.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-446-39509-9

1. Child rearing—United States. 2. Discipline of children—United States. 3. Parent and child—United States. I. Title.

HQ769.G699 1993

649'.1—dc20

93-13576

CIP

ATTENTION: SCHOOLS AND CORPORATIONS

WARNER books are available at quantity discounts with bulk purchase for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please write to: SPECIAL SALES DEPARTMENT, WARNER BOOKS, 1271 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10020.

**ARE THERE WARNER BOOKS
YOU WANT BUT CANNOT FIND IN YOUR LOCAL STORES?**

You can get any WARNER BOOKS title in print. Simply send title and retail price, plus 50¢ per order and 50¢ per copy to cover mailing and handling costs for each book desired. New York State and California residents add applicable sales tax. Enclose check or money order only, no cash please, to: WARNER BOOKS, P.O. BOX 690, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10019.

Cover design by Michèle Brinson Dyson

Cover photograph by Jon Stubblerield

PREFACE

This book grew out of my increasing frustration with the behavior of young people. As I turned forty, I found that maintaining silence became more difficult.

Ethics of work and behavior are declining at an alarming rate. I am *amazed* by the underachievement of many of our young, as the easy way becomes their chosen way.

And I am tired of seeing parents cater to their children's every whim, giving *so* much of themselves, yet frequently receiving so little in return.

It would be simple to give up, and claim that what worked previously is no longer applicable today. But that would also be the easy way.

PREFACE

For I still strongly believe in the essential strength and goodness of people, and feel that millions share this faith. Perhaps they are grandparents, silently watching their grandchildren's behavior in horror. Perhaps they are parents, sensing something is wrong but not knowing what to do about it. And perhaps they are even children, aware that their own self-indulgence and apathy are downright unnatural.

I do know that to regain control we parents need to start communicating, working together, enforcing our standards, and surrounding our children with more love but fewer things. Only when we begin to create change will we and our children be confident once again.

It is in this spirit that I dedicate this book to my two children, Bobby and Mike.

—Fred Gosman

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The previous publication of this book in hardcover by Villard is to me a miracle.

For many months I tried unsuccessfully to find a publisher. "You're no expert," I was told. "Get some credentials."

Instinctively I felt that being an everyday parent instead of an expert was a major plus, not a minus. After all, we parents know our kids best. In addition, I sensed that millions of people shared my frustration with the underachievement and self-centeredness of so many of our young.

So, being a tad stubborn (to be honest, more than a tad), I self-published *Spoiled Rotten*. I filled my car

AUTHOR'S NOTE

with gas, piled the dashboard with maps, and naively began spreading the word in nearby cities. In my wildest dreams I could not have imagined the ground swell of support that followed.

I initially traveled to Indianapolis, where David Mannweiler of the *News* had the guts to call my self-published work "one of the most important" books of the year. After my head came down from the clouds, I pointed the car toward Dayton, to meet with D. L. Stewart, writer of the marvelous nationally syndicated "Paternity Ward" column. To my amazement, he devoted a whole column to me, and termed *Spoiled Rotten* "a double-barreled pep talk for parents." In Toledo, Detroit, Fort Wayne, South Bend, and everywhere, the response was the same. Clearly I was striking a chord; people all over were tired of indulged but still unhappy children.

Miraculously, I shipped the initial three thousand books in just nine weeks, even though they were marketed in only six states. Quickly, I needed to produce five thousand more copies, and then another five thousand as I traveled further from Milwaukee and as word of mouth spread.

Suddenly my mailbox was full of letters from readers who praised the book (I never knew that mail could be so much fun). I *loved* receiving these letters, and encourage new readers to write. I learned much from these communications, and it was very satisfy-

AUTHOR'S NOTE

ing to see my words touch others. One especially kind writer even gave me the ultimate accolade: she said reading *Spoiled Rotten* was like having a conversation with her mother!

Talk radio stations inundated me with requests for interviews, and I even received inquiries about the book from the *Today* show and *Reader's Digest*. You can imagine my excitement. Increasingly my wife and I wondered how we could finance the publication of as many books as we seemingly needed, and how we could handle their distribution. Then along came J.M. of the *W.P.*, and my life changed in ways I could hardly have imagined.

Judy Mann is an award-winning columnist for the *Washington Post*. Yes, the *Washington Post*. Incredibly, she found my book of interest and devoted an *entire* column to it. Well, all hell broke loose. Book sales went nuts, I got *more* calls from newspapers and radio stations, and I even heard from literary agents. I selected an especially engaging fellow, and incredibly, the *first* publisher he showed the book to bought it.

Increasingly it is difficult for a nobody to break into publishing. I want to express my thanks to my agent, Rafe Sagalyn, and my editor, Diane Reverand, for their belief in me.

In a short period of time I have gone from salesman to author, from self-published to published by a division of Random House. I would hope that this in-

AUTHOR'S NOTE

credible change of fortune gives encouragement to everyone contemplating a long shot. For if nothing else, *Spoiled Rotten* proves that if one works quite hard and is blessed with a great deal of luck, dreams can and do occasionally come true.

—Fred Gosman
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
March 1992

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Author's Note	xi
Introduction	3
 SPOILING OUR CHILDREN	
Nurseries of Plenty	9
Toys, Toys, Toys	21
Fashions, Tantrums, and Treats	33
Nintendo Finger and Other Materialisms	43
Don't Worry, Be Happy	55
High School Horrors	67
Fun on Campus	77
 CHANGING OUR CHILDREN	
Disorder All Over	89

CONTENTS

Child-Dominated Homes	101
Punish Me Not	107
Keeping Kids Simple	117
Discipline That Fails	129
A Disciplinary Style That Works	143
APPLICATIONS	
Introduction	161
Birth to Age Five	163
Ages Six Through Thirteen	173
Ages Fourteen Through Nineteen	183
FINAL THOUGHTS	
Questions and Answers	193
Is This Working?	203
Conclusion	205

Spoiled Rotten

INTRODUCTION

What has become of our children?

Remember when kids cut lawns rather than classes, and swore *by* their parents, not *at* them?

When proms didn't cost three hundred dollars, and Memorial Day wasn't just a picnic?

When people got their self-esteem from their home, not from a class in school, and professional tennis players actually behaved?

Recently five children in Pennsylvania were discovered in a park using bags of grass clippings and sugar to operate a make-believe cocaine ring. As one official said, "Whatever happened to lemonade?"

Increasingly our kids get their self-concept from the

INTRODUCTION

number of their toys or the color of their Bugle Boys. Excellence is declining; thoughtfulness is for squares. And good manners is belching softly.

The very moral fabric of society is endangered. Our mayors do drugs; many high schools have nurseries. Alcoholism has invaded the middle school, and date rape on campuses is completely out of control.

Many children today believe they were put on earth to play, that everything must be fun. Math and writing skills are considered irrelevant, needless in an age of calculators, and computers with spell checkers.

Recently a high school teacher assigned a Dickens novel as homework. One student inquired, "Is it on Beta?"

Graduating high school without a limo ride is an embarrassment for life. In college, our best and brightest believe that "life is a beach," and have made "party" a verb.

Even the political science students often don't bother to vote. One young man actually said during a recent survey that the way to boost voter turnout among teens was to "pay them," while another, when asked what made his country special, answered, "Cable TV."

When was the last time a neighbor's kid rang your doorbell and asked to shovel your walk or mow your lawn? And this in an age of power mowers and snow-

INTRODUCTION

throwers. Kids could easily earn ten dollars an hour, but they can't be bothered.

The Gentleman's C has invaded the middle school, and frequently teachers encounter lack of effort, disrespect, and possible assault. Many ten-year-olds know the names of twice as many beers as political leaders. And as standards in general and student performance decline, work that was once described as mediocre is now praised as excellent, with the result that our children are never pushed to discover their true potential.

How can we take back our kids, restoring respect, excellence, civility, and decent values, not to mention self-esteem? For these children of plenty are *not* happy. In a survey of students listed in *Who's Who in American High Schools*, an incredible 28 percent said they had considered suicide. And these are some of the best.

Our kids need discipline, direction, love, and the gift of our time. Nothing more, nothing less. The battle has not been lost; their lives *can* be turned around. But the excessive gifts and toys must end, the unreasonable concern for their every thought and feeling must end, and the acceptance of their mediocrity must end.

We must make crystal clear what our standards are, and clearly communicate and vigorously enforce consequences when they are breached.

INTRODUCTION

It is time to remind our children that they are, alas, just children; that although they are exceedingly important, the earth still revolves around the sun.

Our youngsters deserve a life of substance, happiness, and value, just as we deserve their cooperation and civility. We cannot allow this to go on any longer.

The time for change is NOW.