Kathleen Kendall – Daydreaming Commentary Transcript

And he doesn't see the heavy coal truck coming towards him and is hit and sustains serious injuries. The script ends with the harsh conclusion that Donald's daydreaming had become a serious danger.

The construction of the story is quite clever, I think, because it suggests that even if Donald does recover from his injuries, unless he faces up to his problems and grows a spine – his nightmare will come true – he will be a failure in life

The poor parenting that Donald received led him to 'run away' from difficult issues rather than facing them head-on.

In case listeners missed this message from following the play, Jack Griffin's commentary following its broadcast makes it clear.

In fact, in his dissection of the story, Griffin demonstrates democratic child- rearing principles. For example, he suggests that Donald's behaviour had a purpose, he says 'although daydreaming may seem unimportant and unproblematic'...from a psychiatrist's point of view day dreaming such as Donald's is serious. It is a sign of his retreat from reality. Donald found that real life was painful, uncomfortable and embarrassing. So he closed his mind to the harsh and unpleasant facts of his life – as it was – and focused his attention on the pleasant world of make-believe. In this way Donald was able to feel less anxious and a great deal more comfortable'.

Had Donald's parents or his teacher recognized Donald's daydreaming as a danger sign - they could have given him the understanding, sympathetic support and guidance that he needed to face his problems rather than run away from

them and ultimately put his life in danger.

Griffin furthermore states that the blame for the situation lay partly in the kind of family and home life that Donald had and partly in Donald himself. However, it is evident that the parents hold ultimate responsibility. It is because of his father's harshness and impatience; and his mother's overprotectiveness and dominance that Donald felt his life to be painful, uncomfortable and embarrassing in the first place. Griffin proposes that 'If Donald's father could have put his arm around his son and said to him, "I know something is bothering you, son – and I want to understand and help' that this would have been much better. Here, Griffin is illustrating the principle that children's bad behaviour should be addressed through discussion, guidance and direction rather than condemnation or corporal punishment. It is through such discussion that children learn right from wrong and to take responsibility for their own actions. Such an approach to parenting would have put into practice the principles and methods of democracy. Unfortunately, Griffin notes, there was no real teamwork between Donald and either parent.

Had his parents adopted a teamwork approach, then Donald would have learned to take responsibility for his actions, and solved his problems in a much more constructive fashion. In this way, his parents would have helped Donald to help himself – Donald would have internalized the mental hygiene message. As Griffin tells to the audience 'the most effective approach is to help the child think about this problems and work out a plan for himself'.

The teacher, too, Griffin suggests could have been more helpful. Indeed, every audience member has a role to play in preventing situations like Donald's from happening, Griffin implores: 'all of us have opportunities for helping people with emotional difficulties such as Donald and his family.'

This script and commentary nicely illustrate, I think, the ultimate aim of mental hygienists like Griffin – to have each Canadian citizen follow expert advice -- to put into practice the philosophy of mental hygiene by keeping surveillance over one another and one's self in order to detect and correct emotional maladjustments and more severe mental health problems as soon as possible. And to seek expert help if needed. And, really, the future of Canada – and the world – depended upon it!

Such sentiment is captured in publicity material for one of the series, and this is a quote from one of the pamphlets: '...human nature will have to be changed in a hurry if we are to survive in the atomic age. And where do we begin to change human nature? With ourselves of course! And how do we begin? By understanding the reasons for our behaviour and our attitudes. And with greater understanding of ourselves, perhaps we can help our children grow up into happy and useful citizens. When the causes of hostility and aggressive actions are well understood, perhaps the world will become a happier and safer placer for all its citizens!'

So here is the key mental hygiene message. However, at the centre of this project, there really is a contradiction: children were to be recognized and treated as autonomous individuals with minds of their own on the one hand, but on the other they were also simultaneously expected to conform to prescribed norms of behavior.