

TEACHING THE YOUNG IDEA TO SIT ON FLAGPOLES

“OH, AIN'T HE GRAND!”

These simple words dimmed the applause of 4,000 watchers as the fifteen-year-old boy slid to the ground.

“Oh, ain't he grand!” was the only expression that fourteen-year-old Lena Stamm could find to let the world know what impression the boy friend's achievement had made on her, we read in the *Baltimore Sun*. For Lena, as Avon “Azie” Foreman of Baltimore put it, is his “best girl.” She had been on hand every day and the early part of every night during the past ten days while Avon was “busily” engaged in establishing his record. Now, as he triumphantly descended the pole, she was on hand with his family to greet the champion juvenile flagpole-sitter of the world, who had been aloft ten days, ten hours, ten minutes, and ten seconds, resting on an old ironing-board. That Avon knew she was there, continues *The Sun*, and had heard what she had to say above the din of honking automobile horns and cheering crowd, he showed by shouting “Yea, Lena!” as soon as his feet hit the ground.

But the glory of the individual, alas, because it inspires so many emulators, is sometimes short-lived. Suddenly an extremely surprised Baltimore found itself full of young disciples of “Shipwreck” Kelly, or St. Simeon Stylites, who sat for years on top of a pillar, or *Peter Pan*, who, it will be recalled, spent considerable time in the tree tops. Presently Avon was dethroned. The “crown of sittersdom, with its splendor, its claims and prerogatives, its title, its dignity and glitter,” passed to the head of a new champion on the night of August 10. Continuing, in *The Sun* of the next morning:

Sheer endurance, grit, and stamina wrested it from the hands of the once-famed “Azie” Foreman and rested it lightly on the brow of Jimmy Jones, twelve. The tick of the clock which made it 8:10:11 o'clock last night, made Jimmy the juvenile flagpole-sitting champion of the world. At that precise moment he had eclipsed “Azie's” squatting record of 250 hours, 10 minutes and 10 seconds by one tick of the clock.

All that is necessary now to make it official is a visit from Mayor Broening, a gold-seal testimonial, and a speech in his back yard at 405 Edgewood Street.

And if Jimmy doesn't decide to come down to earth for the coronation ceremonies before long, he's going to miss out on a lot of glory—the Mayor's vacation time is rolling around. Jimmy's out to sit fifteen days.

After Avon's feat had come the deluge of youngsters eager to seize his crown. All over Baltimore boys and girls took to the tops of trees and poles at such a rate, and contributed such a wealth of amusing incidents and circumstances, that we confess we are perplexed as to just what to pass on to our readers. The new sport spread so rapidly that in one issue the *Baltimore Evening Sun* reported twenty-five boys and girls, ranging in age from ten to fifteen years, in the contest. Mayor Broening made it “official” by congratulating and encouraging the aspirants with references to the “grit and stamina” so essential in



HAIL TO THE CHIEF!

Here comes Avon, first of the juvenile flagpole-sitting champions, sliding down after his feat, wearing his crown.

"the great struggle of life" and the "old pioneer spirit of early America." The city building inspectors were kept busy testing the safety of poles. The letter columns of the Baltimore papers were full of communications, indignant, laudatory, and satirical. *The Sun*, editorially, was inclined to frown, but *The Evening Sun*

put this caption over one letter of protest: "Oh, this is midsummer, when all of us are more or less 'nutty,' and the kids must be doing something for their amusement. They might be doing worse than sitting on a pole. A law? Oh, fudge!" No, the writers of letters to the paper were not idle. Here are some of their expressions in *The Evening Sun*:

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Evening Sun*:

Sir—What a delight I took in gathering my little brood together the other day to trudge out to Ethelhurst Avenue to see little "Azie" Foreman come down from his long pole-sitting.

It was to me an inspiring sight when little "Azie" slid down the pole. He had shown the indomitable spirit and courage of a real Christian youth, like the Crusaders of old, and I was proud to be there to applaud him. It is from such boys great missionaries are made.

Think of it, here this good little boy had sat way up in the air for over ten days, uncomplaining and alone, and he had the grit to remain up there day and night for ten long days, including Sunday, when he had to miss his Sunday-school.

Such boys are an honor to the city, and I am, oh, so happy that our good Mayor gave him a diploma and made a beautiful speech about the little hero.

Let us rejoice that among the tots of our Baltimore we have grand boys like little "Azie" Foreman.

AN AMERICAN MOTHER.

We suspect that the foregoing is ironical in intent, but we do not know. However, there is no doubt about the following:

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Evening Sun*:

Sir—I see by the paper that Mayor Broening was present at a celebration given the Foreman flagpole-sitter, and I certainly think the Mayor of our city could find a more beneficial way of spending his time.

Let the neighbors and kids make all the "whoopie" over him they like, but when it comes to city officials wasting time on such nonsense, I think some one should protest.

There are plenty of boys in the city struggling for more than ten days on some problem of merit, whose accomplishments might be given recognition, but one never hears of them. Only ordinary achievements seem to count nowadays.

YOURS FOR HIGHER CULTURE.

This last letter provoked this heated retort:

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Evening Sun*:

Sir—In reply to the letter of "Yours for Higher Culture," I should like to know if he knows the difference between good sportsmanship and culture. I don't think he's got much of an idea of what a Mayor should be, anyway. He states that the Mayor should find a more beneficial way to spend his time than going to help congratulate the little Foreman boy on his success at flagpole-sitting.

We've got a real Mayor—one who is a good sport and who is not one of those snobbish and overly cultured rulers, and I'm for him!

As for going out to "Azie" Foreman's triumphant down-coming—that brings out all the more his fineness. "Azie" did deserve a lot of credit, and Mayor Broening was sport enough to see that he got it.

U. B. WISE.

Avon's long sit, which resulted, we learn, from an argument with another boy, revealed him as a lyricist of no mean powers, according to this *Sun* article:

Singing is about as satisfactory a means as any of breaking monotony and encouraging oneself in the realization of an ambition, so down from the perch in clear tones floated Avon's latest

FLAGPOLES

effusion, a combination of ready-made music and home-spun words, "The Flagpole Melody":

There's only one thing wrong—
I can't play ball;
I can sit and sing,
Dream most anything,
But I can't come down.

Chorus

When the sun goes down and
the moon comes up,
I still stay put,
Till the tenth day round,
Then I'll come down;
That's the flagpole melody.

When the dawn, it comes,
And folks gather round,
I can sit and eat
And shake my feet,
But I won't come down.

All of the "sits," naturally, were not successful. For example, *The Evening Sun* of August 6 tells us:

The "grit and stamina" so essential, according to Mayor Broening, "in the great struggle of life," got on the nerves of Johnny Sudhop's mother.

And another flagpole-sitter bit the dust.

"The old pioneer spirit of early America," with which the Mayor has dignified the pole-sitting profession, also got under the skin of Charles Wilson's mother. And Charles came down to earth, too.

Johnny, eight years old, had been up since August 2 on a pole behind his home at 5 South Hilton Street. Until yesterday Oliver Lewis had been sitting on the same pole with him. But Oliver's mother decided to go to Cambridge yesterday, and she wanted to take Oliver with her. So down he came.

Then to-day Johnny's mother began to worry about him. "He was beginning to get on her nerves up there," it was explained at the Sudhop home. And finally she called him down.

The second sitter to alight to-day was Charles Wilson, fourteen years old, of 1717 West North Avenue. He had gone aloft yesterday afternoon. But the ironing-board on which he had planned to sleep proved to be uncomfortably short. He didn't sleep at all last night, and this morning his mother signaled to him to descend.

Stephen Jarmosh, Ben Hess, John Baumgartner, Jimmy Maloney, Tanky Little, Charles Ruppert and Noots Ruppert to-day wrote from Colgate as follows:

"All us boys just know you can't be knowing that Bill Ruppert, one of your 'Evening Sun Service Club' sub-carriers is on top of an eighteen-foot 'flagpole,' and has been since Thursday, August 1, 2:30 P. M.! What'll we do about him? He just won't come down to go swimming or nothing! He says he's going to stay up there fifteen days! Just think of it—fifteen days, no swimming and no paper delivering. He's got a sub, but, anyhow, Bill's missing things."

At the moment of writing, with the situation changing daily, even hourly, it is impossible for us to do more, beyond announcing the first two champions, than present a few dramatic moments of this pageant. Feminism asserted itself early, *The Sun* tells us, when Ruth McCrudden, ten, mounted the top of a twenty-five-foot pole in her back yard. Reading on:

Every preparation was made for her to do her sitting in the approved fashion. A tent, to house her boy friends during the nights, was erected at the foot of the pole. The skyward end of her perch had every modern appliance, perfected since the ten-day sit of the recently crowned champion. There were a reclining board and an electric light.

Ruth began her record-breaking attempt by dining frequently on ice-cream and combing her hair in spare moments. The only thing she dreaded was thunder-storms, but if any should come—well, they wouldn't stop her, she said. She'd show the world and a few of her uppish boy friends what a girl can do, she declared.

But presently Ruth had a rival of her own sex, Dorothy Staylor, thirteen. Says *The Sun* further:

Dorothy climbed a seventeen-foot pole for a seventeen-day stay. She took the following articles aloft:



"EVERYTHING IS PIP!"
So announced ten-year-old
Ruth McCrudden, the first girl
sitter, from the top of her lofty perch.

FLAGPOLES

Two pillows and a blanket, a tent and an electric light, so rigged that she could have it inside or outside the tent; a sweater, cap, silk scarf, raincoat, umbrella, a belt to keep her from falling, a copy of a magazine, "Robbin Hollow," and "Judy's Perfect Day" from the Pratt Library, and a bucket to pull up things.

Dorothy said she would have a radio on the pole with her.

If Dorothy stays aloft for fifteen days, "Mom" says she will have a band for her. Boy friends have sent up chewing-gum, candy, and pennies.

But presently the juvenile flagpole-sitting fraternity was seriously disturbed over a question of ethics, which *The Sun* explains thus:

If any one can be found to act as supreme arbiter of the Lofty Squatters' Equity Union, some of Baltimore's would-be

champions may find themselves disqualified through failure to promote the professional dignity of their occupation. The situation has been complicated into the problem of when is a flagpole-sitter not sitting on a flagpole.

Luxury and flagpole-sitting just don't go together, is the view some take, while on the other hand, the answer is, "Why not, just so long as they continue to sit?"

Mrs. Rebecca McCruden, mother of ten-year-old Ruth, decided to investigate the tremendous subject of flagpole-sitting to her satisfaction. Mrs. McCruden was stirred over the reports that Dorothy Staylor, thirteen, had cushions, a back-rest, a radio, and all the comforts of a young lady's boudoir on her pole in the rear of 1230 Light Street.

Ruth has none of these things, not even a shelter over the top, and Mrs. McCruden announced her belief that Ruth had the makings of an honest-to-goodness champion, and had not sought the pampered, easy method of besting "Azie" Foreman's juvenile record.

After a visit to the flagpole of her daughter's feminine rival for sitting honors, Mrs. McCruden declared that "Ruth is sitting on a regular pole, and not on a divan fifteen feet in the air."

And, sure enough, Ruth was sitting on a regular pole, but even the hearty words of encouragement given her by none other than the Mayor of Baltimore failed to stir her to any enthusiasm. She told Mayor Broening she was going to beat "Azie's" record, and that was all.

"If you get lonely up there," the Mayor advised, "get some of your boy friends to come up and keep you company."

"All right," said Ruth.

The Mayor then signed Ruth's autograph album, and over his name wrote the following words:

"With best wishes. Have courage, determination, and remember that stamina and grit are essential in the great struggle of life."

The Mayor announced his interest in the safety of the flagpole sitters. He tested wire supports, and told Ruth's backers there was no danger of the pole falling.

Down in South Baltimore, Dorothy lolled atop her comfortable pole, and grinned to an admiring host of neighborhood juveniles whose mothers will not permit them to ascend for the glory of being "the champ." Dorothy had her radio going full blast, and announced that she had suffered no hardship so far. She didn't seem particularly interested in the question of flagpole ethics.

"I'm sitting anyway," she asserted.

Turning again to *The Evening Sun*, we find more dissonance and discord creeping into the flagpole melody. Some of the harsh notes follow:

"Why hasn't Mayor Broening been down in South Baltimore?"

"That Staylor girl — she couldn't fall off if she wanted to."

"Why doesn't some one send Gus Graves a good breakfast?"

And all the while the volume of flagpole sitters was increasing, two new names having been inscribed upon the roll of — well, two new names hav-

FLAGPOLES



ing been inscribed upon the roll.

The complaint that the Mayor was playing favorites came from a next-door neighbor of Miss Dorothy Staylor. It went something like this:

"He's spending too much time out on Pall Mall Road. He doesn't seem to know that South Baltimore's on the map. And why doesn't this girl get better write-ups? She's got grit. And she hasn't got any more comforts than a lot of the other kids that are on poles."

Dorothy, who had been reclining upon an aerial divan with a radio at her elbow, abandoned the cushions of her couch and came down to hard wood. But that didn't suit Mrs. James Jones, the mother of Jimmy Jones.

"She has entirely too easy a time of it," Mrs. Jones declared. "It's impossible for her to fall out."

Mrs. Jones added that she didn't know when Jimmie was coming down, but that she hoped it would be soon. She

said he didn't seem to be minding it much, but that she was about to break beneath the strain.

"I've been up for eight nights now," she said. "And when you've gone for eight nights without any sleep, you feel it. I just can't go to bed and leave him up out there alone. He's an only child, and I just have to stay up."

The proprietor of a lunchroom on Twenty-seventh Street, near Sisson Street, who is serving as observer in the sit of August Graves, brought up the question of food.

After reporting that he could see Gus's feet sticking from underneath the covers, he asked why some one didn't get big-hearted and send Gus a nice hot breakfast.

Melvin Floyd, Catonsville sitter, wrote the following letter to the editor of *The Evening Sun*:

DEAR SIR:

I am a jr. flagpole sitter which started August 6 at 9:30 A. M. I have three witnesses, my brother and two other friends. I would like to know the rules of a jr. flagpole sitter. I would like to get the rules as soon as possible.

Yours truly,

MELVIN L. FLOYD.

Another general impression "rampant throughout the flagpole-sitting sections was that this sitter or that sitter wasn't getting enough publicity." Reading on:

The Pikesville police were genuinely indignant about the casual manner in which the sit of Ralph Knott, at Montrose Avenue, has been treated by the daily press.

"He deserves a better write-up," they declared.

"You're missing a good story out here," declared backers of Harry Jeffery, who is on a thirty-foot pole at 3137 Virginia Avenue. "Why don't you send out and get some pictures of him? He's sitting on the highest pole in town, and he's really sitting, too."

William Wentworth, who is six hours sitting behind Jimmy Jones, was the host at a pole party. Avon Foreman, the self-crowned king of all the pole-sitters, was the guest of honor.

Avon advised William not to stay up on his pole fifteen days, as William planned, because, the champ said, the contender might get sick.

Next season, Avon announced, he is going to go back up on the hickory stick in the back yard of his home at 5704 Ethelbert Avenue, throw his ironing-board overboard and make it a strictly sitting sit that will challenge all records.

There was mourning among the sitters, as well as dissonance, *The Sun* continues, telling of the loss suffered by one of the "leading exponents of the sedentary art":

Some ruthless, conscienceless person filched the choicest page from the guest-autograph book of Ruth McCrudden

while she was busily engaged in bringing the fairer sex to the fore in the race for the juvenile squatter championship.

And what good is the champion title, even if she is successful in wresting the crown from the brow of the pioneering "Azie" Foreman, without the autograph of Mayor Broening to attest his recognition of her grit and stamina?

The Mayor's flowing signature led the missing page. It was there affixed on the occasion of his journey to Ruth's backyard to urge the equal-rights sitter to "have courage."

In the hour of her bereavement Ruth turned for consolation to the rôle of comforter. She penned a brief note to Albert Boschke, seventeen-year-old baker boy stowaway on the *Graf Zeppelin* on its flight to America from Friedrichshafen, who was held pending deportation proceedings.

"Dear Albert," the note read, "I am sorry you are not getting the reception you deserve, as you have nerve. Altho you have done wrong, you have got what our Mayor told us to have, and that's courage. Wishing you better luck next time."

The letter was accompanied by \$2 from Ruth's donation box.

In other parts of the realm of sitting, the cycle of events maintained a steady course. Three new candidates shinnied up poles, one toppled out of a tree and his arm was broken, and nineteen others, including two females, just sat.

The list of those in the running would be one name greater, except for the fact that James Wittee, ten, just about an hour after pressing into service a tree in back of his home, 2130 Eagle Street, lost his balance and fell.

The donation box referred to above was an important feature of nearly every "sit." The box, we learn, was placed at the bottom of the pole to receive the contributions of gratified spectators. Ruth, according to *The Evening Sun*, collected \$22 in nine days. Reading on of the "box-office" luck of others:

The box receipts of her sit were exceeded only by those reported by James Stanton, who reported that he had taken in \$40 in seven days.

The next person in line was William Vettle, who said he had received \$20 for eight days of sitting.

Harold Schamel reported that he had taken in \$16. Harold and Ruth have both enjoyed the patronage of Mayor William F. Broening during their sits.



"I'M SITTING, ANYWAY"

Retorted Dorothy Staylor, thirteen, when detractors claimed that she had so many luxuries on top of her pole that it was really a divan in the air.

LITERARY DIGEST

August 31, 1929

p. 34