

"When I was a kid," Paul tells me, "we used to play something we called the politeness game. The idea was to stop some man in the street and ask for the time, but to do it so politely and pleasantly that he gave you not only the time, but a smile and a few nice words as well."

"That was the game?"

"Well, we had a point system. One point for the time, a second for a smile, and a third for an answer, like 'That's all right' --- or even 'You're welcome' when we said thank you. The fourth and most decisive point was (A) if he went on to ask our name or anything about us."

"But what was the idea of the game?"

"Well, on the surface the idea was just to score four points by being polite and cheerful. But the truth was that I --- and my friends too, I'm sure --- got a tremendous thrill out of being polite and seeing how that politeness forced a pleasant response."

"Did it always?"

"Almost always. Maybe because we were young and the part of town we lived in was rough, our politeness was unexpected. Most people were (B) off guard --- some were even a little upset, as if they were wondering, (C)'What's the kid after?' But then, the funny thing was, a good many of the people held on to us."

"How do you mean, held on?"

"Well, they were reluctant to give us the time and walk away, to (D)let it go at that. We were kind (E) a challenge, so pleasant and polite, and they were curious. The usual question was, 'Are you new here?' and I'd get a kick out of answering, 'Oh, no, sir. I've lived here all my life.' It (F) them up. Most kids, to them, were mean little savages. Why were we so polite and mannerly?"

"Did you ever use the game later?"

"Well, when I was a teen-ager I used to play the game with the parents of the girls I (G)went out with. I'd call the father 'sir,' and I'd stand up when the mother came into the room."

"(H)How did it work?"

Paul laughs. "I'll tell you. The first time I tried it, the girl was furious. When we were alone, she said, 'Why are you making fun of my parents?' and (I)I had a job convincing her I really meant it. But her parents --- wow! From then on I could do no wrong. (J)They were furious with her, she told me, when we split up."
