

Evening Record - Courier-Tribune

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Integration, Portage County Style

Editor,

Record-Courier:

On the Friday before Labor Day two little boys in Kent discovered for the first time that America is not the country of "liberty and justice for all."

My son's schoolmate is stalwart, handsome, gracious in speech and manner. He is a Negro.

He does not know that to be a Negro is shameful, or less good than to be white. His parents have been careful to shelter him from this feeling. He has been growing up unself-conscious, proud, natural, happy.

August 31 is hot. The boys beg to go swimming. Merrily we pile in the car and head for the beach where children may swim for 25 cents apiece.

The gate boy stops us. "Do you have a membership card? You can't get in without one."

"Why, I've come scores of times with

out a membership card!"

He looks embarrassed.

"Do you mean we can't swim because my son's friend is Negro?"

"Personally, I wouldn't mind, but it's the policy of the management..."

"Ridiculous! That two little friends can't swim together on a hot day! Let me speak to the manager."

The owner lives in a house overlooking the lake. He and his little boy can go swimming any time. Because he has money and power he can prohibit my two hot little boys from swimming this day. (The nearest state-owned beach is Virginia Kendall park near Akron, an unfeasible distance.)

"Mother, go see the owner! I'm SURE he'll let us swim! I can hardly wait to go swimming! Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

(Oh, shining faith of little boys!)

It is no use. The owner does not invite us to swim.

The owner is afraid that if this little boy plays in the water on this hot afternoon that all the white people will leave, and then there will be all Negroes at the beach, and then there will be intermarriage... (Why does every argument have to reduce to that absurd proposition!)... and then all the people who bought property around the beach will lose money and of course money is the most important value in the world.

Isn't it odd that brotherhood, that noble concept, is just a word to piously proclaim in church, or for somebody else "down there" to practice?

Two little boys drive home sad and disillusioned.

Who IS hurt the most?

Perhaps it is we, the community, who are hurt for tolerating a moral wrong and hypocrisy.

Should bathing facilities be allowed the ruse of calling themselves "private clubs" solely for the purpose of segregating Negro citizens? In every respect they are public. The designation "private club" is euphemistic eyewash. Are there no Christian beach operators with courage to take a stand for democracy?

Is it fair to refuse any of Kent's citizens the right to "pursuit of happiness?"

Beverly Nygreen