

# The Guidance Counselor

by Con Chapman

He got his degree and then a job, counseling  
students on their futures. He'd see them for  
fifteen minutes at a time, juniors and seniors,  
all day long. On their way out of the little town  
he'd come back to. He'd gone twenty-five miles  
away and no further. He only spoke to the  
best and the brightest; the vocational kids

weren't going anywhere, the middle of the  
class would end up like him. It was the  
college prep kids whose parents pushed  
them to him, to make sure they were taking  
the right courses, getting involved in the  
right activities. He made sure they looked  
good on paper, where it counted.

At home, his own kids were out of control;  
they smoked, they drank, they let their hair grow.  
They talked back to him. His wife said  
she could do nothing with them. And so as he  
guided the good kids down the  
chute towards prosperity and respectability,  
his own slipped behind the point he'd worked

so hard to reach: a home in town, nothing much,  
but respectable. Each day he'd stare into the eyes  
of the children who'd been raised right; each night  
he'd return home to find his wife smoking a cigarette  
over a frying pan, cooking hamburgers, with no idea  
where his boys were or when they'd be back. He  
knew they weren't playing sports, they'd given that



up long ago. He suspected they were hanging out at the drive-in, drinking Cokes and wasting time, not making anything of themselves as he had, coming from nothing—a farm north of town—and going off to college to get a white-collar job. No, they had the work ethic of their mother; she'd latched on to him as the girl he knew at home, the one he could always

depend on being there when he drove back from college. One day as he finished up at school he gazed long into the eyes of a boy who was going to college back east; a math genius, his father a doctor. Why couldn't my boys be like that, he almost said aloud as he ushered the boy out his wood and frosted glass office door. Then he went home, as if in a daze, opened up the back door and found his wife



smoking, as usual. He opened up the knife drawer, took one out and said "C'mon—upstairs." She didn't believe him at first, thought he was kidding, but he backed her out of the kitchen, up to the second floor where the boys' bedroom was. There he kept her until the kids came home, trooped upstairs and ran past him into the room to find her sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. Their father told them to sit down next



to her; they were all going to stay there for a good long time until they'd changed their attitude. The boys complained at first but after a while realized that their father meant business; the knife was real, and the look on his face was grim, determined. "What do you want us to *do*?" one of the boys asked in a sharp tone.

"I want you to *make* something of yourselves," he snapped.  
"And *you*," he snarled at his wife, "I want you to make something



out of them while I'm gone all day making something out of other people's kids." The mother and the two boys sat nervously, not moving, like dolls lined up on the floor, the sun from the west spilling over their shoulders. They stared across the room at the father, who finally had to get up and relieve himself in the bathroom down the hall. The elder boy climbed out a window quickly, shinnied down a pole, and ran to the police station ten blocks away.

The police surrounded the house and the man came out with his hands up over his head; he'd dropped the knife when they told him to. They put him away in the State Home of the Mentally Disturbed, where he advised other inmates on career choices available to them.

*From Town Folk & Country People*

