THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

A FRIEND writes:

About five o'clock last Sunday evening, my son burst into the kitchen and said, "I didn't know it was so late!" He was due at a party immediately—a sixties party, he said—and he needed something from the sixties to wear. My son is almost fifteen years old, the size of a grown man, and when he bursts into a room glassware rattles and the cat on your lap grabs on to your knees and leaps from the starting block. I used to think the phrase "burst into the room" was only for detective fiction, until my son got his growth. He can burst in a way that, done by an older fellow, would mean that angels had descended into the front yard and were eating apples off the tree, and he does it whenever he's late—as, being my son, he often is. I have so little sense of time that when he said he needed something from the sixties it took me a moment to place that decade. It's the one he was born toward the end of.

I asked, "What sort of stuff you want to wear?"

He said, "I don't know. Whatever they wore then."

We went up to the attic, into a long, low room under the eaves where I've squirrelled away some boxes of old stuff; I dug into one box, and the first thing I hauled out was the very thing he wanted. A thigh-length leather vest covered with fringe and studded with silver, it dates from around 1967, a fanciful time in college-boy fashions. Like many boys, I grew up in nice clothes my mother bought, but was meanwhile admiring Roy Rogers, Sergeant Rock, the Cisco Kid, and other sharp dressers, so when I left home I was ready to step out and be somebody. Military Surplus was the basic style then—olive drab, and navy-blue pea jackets—with a touch of Common Man in the work boots and blue work shirts, but if you showed up in Riverboat Gambler or Spanish Peasant or Rodeo King nobody blinked, nobody laughed. I haven't worn the vest in ten years, but a few weeks ago, seeing a picture of Michael Jackson wearing a fancy band jacket like the ones the Beatles wore on the cover of "Sgt. Pepper," I missed the fun I used to have getting dressed in the morning. Pull on the jeans, a shirt with brilliant-red roses, a pair of Red Wing boots. A denim jacket. Rose-tinted glasses. A cowboy hat. Or an engineer's cap. Or, instead of jeans, bib overalls. Or white trousers with blue stripes. Take off the denim jacket, take off the rose shirt, try the neon-green bowling shirt with "Moose" stitched on the pocket, the black dinner jacket. Now the dark-green Chinese Army cap. And an orange tie with hula dancers and palm trees.

Then—presto!—I pulled the rose shirt out. He put it on, and the vest, which weighs about fifteen pounds, and by then I had found him a hat—a broad-brimmed panama that ought to make you think of a cotton planter enjoying a Sazerac on a veranda in New Orleans. I followed him down to his bedroom, where he admired himself in a full-length mirror.

"Who wore this?" he asked.

I said that I did.

"Did you really? This? You?"

Yes, I really did. After he was born, in 1969, I wore it less and less, finally settling down with what I think of as the Dad look, and now I would no sooner wear my old fringed vest in public than walk around in a taffeta tutu. I loved the fact that it fitted him so well, though, and his pleasure at the heft and extravagance of the thing, the poses he struck in front of the mirror. Later, when he got home and reported that his costume was a big hit and that all his friends had tried on the vest, it made me happy again. You squirrel away old stuff on the principle of its being useful and interesting someday; it's wonderful when the day finally arrives. That vest was waiting for a boy to come along—a boy who has a flair for the dramatic, who bursts into rooms—and to jump right into the part. I'm happy to be the audience.

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Ultimate

ON a raw, gray, drizzly Sunday afternoon recently—a day better suited to staying indoors and watching the college basketball playoffs on TV—we had the good luck to happen upon the Ultimate Frisbee team from the Bronx High School of Science practicing at the Ninety-eighth Street football field in Central Park. There was a suitcase-size radio on the sidelines, blasting out songs by the Specials and the Police, and down by one of the goal lines the players, sixteen or seventeen young men dressed in warmup clothes of Dickensian shabbiness—baggy shorts

and sweatpants, layers of worn-out T-shirts and sweaters, woollen gloves on one hand—were running through some short-passing drills. Shouting, waving their arms, they dodged and cut around each other, and dived after a gray Frisbee that—thrown with a sidearm snap—seemed never to rise more than a foot or so off the ground. Ultimate Frisbee, it should be pointed out, bears only a slight resemblance to the mellow, free-form, do-your-own-thing version of Frisbee played on beaches and in front of college dorms. It's a fast, disciplined game, in which each of two seven-man teams attempts to pass a Frisbee the length of a seventy-yard field without dropping it or being intercepted—a point is scored every time a team gets the Frisbee across the opposing goal line—and when it's played well, with fast-breaking offenses and elaborate man-to-man and zone defenses, the game is a little like basketball without baskets or dribbling. In Ultimate, as it's called, the Frisbee rarely floats in those lazy, looping, parabolic arcs that make a Frisbee sometimes seem lighter than air; the passes are hard and flat, and a good player, in addition to mastering the standard backhand flipping motion, must be able to "air-bounce" the Frisbee—make it dip under a defender's arm and then swoop up again—and also throw it forehand (as if skipping a stone), overhand (like a tomahawk), and discus style (for showing off).

We were filled in on these and other fine points of Ultimate by Larry Geismar, the team treasurer for Bronx Science, who was on the sidelines that afternoon, nursing a sore back (he had hurt it the day before: a noble injury, incurred during the team's 21–19 comeback victory over Columbia University) and minding the jackets. He also explained that the team was then about three and a half hours into a projected seven-hour marathon practice and intra-squad game to raise money for trips to a Frisbee tournament in Syracuse the following weekend and to the Eastern High School Championship (Bronx Science has won the tournament the last two times it's been held), in Washington, D.C., later this spring. "We don't get any money from the school administration, so all our players have lined up people to sponsor them for this marathon," Larry said. "The idea is that they'll pay a certain amount for every hour we play. Our whole school is really into Frisbee—it's like a cult thing. We've got five teams now: A, B, D, freshman, girls'. The A team—that's most of us here—beats *everybody*. We beat all the other high schools; we even beat college teams. You know, our school has this reputation for being very high-powered academically, and sports don't really play that big a part. We're the only championship team in the whole school, in *anything*. It's interesting that in this area the best schools academically—Science, Stuyvesant, Scarsdale, out in Westchester—are also the best in Frisbee."

"Does that mean you have to be smart to play Frisbee?" we asked.

"Do you have to be smart?" Larry thought for a second, and then reached out and put his arm around a player who happened to be coming off the field just then. "Nah," he said, smiling. "Just look at Kenny Miller, here."

Kenny (who had already caught our eye as the smallest but probably the most energetic player on the field) grinned back, and said, "You don't have to be tall, either."

"What you do need to play Frisbee," Larry went on, "is determination, quickness, agility. You have to want to run. If you don't run, you don't play on this team. You also want to throw smart passes. Mike, over there—he's the best at that." He pointed to a short, curly-haired young man who had an unnerving way of looking in one direction and throwing in another, the way Bill Bradley used to. "That's Mike McManus, one of our co-captains," Larry said. "Whenever I'm playing with him, I know that if I'm open, somehow he'll get me the Frisbee. It's just a feeling you develop—like trust."

By now, the team had separated into two groups and had begun to scrimmage, and some of the other players we noticed—all of them, it turned out, with great names as well as great Frisbee skills—were William Chen, a stocky young man who was tirelessly aggressive on defense, crowding the man with the Frisbee and forcing him to throw off balance; Phineas Baxandall, tall and Nordic-looking, in a knit Icelandic cap, with a long, loping stride and a way of pumping his arm which immediately suggested Joe Morgan in the batter's box; Wyeth Hunnable, an astounding jumper, wearing a pirate's red bandanna on his head; Alex Gottschalk, another strong defender, who covered practically the entire middle of the field by himself; and Sal Sanchez, a player so smooth and graceful he seemed able to disappear now and then and to beam himself invisibly to another part of the field, where he would suddenly materialize again just as the Frisbee arrived. At one point, the Frisbee changed hands six or seven times, sailing up and down the field, without a single point being scored. Then Mike McManus, trapped along the side, turned and swung a quick pass back across to William Chen, who

wound up and threw a bomb—a long, soaring pass that travelled on a line more than half the length of the field. Down at the other end, Alex Gottschalk, crouched, sprang for it, and just missed. The Frisbee, for once behaving like one, simply hovered there —in that magical way Frisbees do—spinning about ten feet above the goal line, until Wyeth Hunnable, after waiting what seemed much too long, finally leaped up and grabbed it. For a second, he seemed to dangle in the air, as if the Frisbee were supporting him.

"The great thing about Frisbee is that it's just something to let loose with," Larry Geismar said. "There's no authority, no grown-ups. We all coach each other. Most of us do other stuff as well—I'm a musician, Mike canoes, a lot of the players have jobs—and we don't have time for organized sports. But Frisbee is different. We have practice every day, but you don't *have* to go. We do it just because we like to. And something else: for some reason, girls really like Frisbee players. It's like they *worship* us. At school, all the time, we have these freshman girls coming up to us in the halls and saying, 'Oh, I know you—you're on the A team.' "

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, the Chairman of the Board, and I don't mean Ol' Blue Eyes."

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Night Life

A LARGE and joyous cocktail party was still in progress the other Sunday in an apartment across the street from Carnegie Hall when our friend Alexis Gregory began to round up our little group. It consisted at that point of Gregor von Rezzori, whose novel "The Death of My Brother Abel" will be published in English by Viking in January of 1985; his wife, Beatrice (pronounced the Italian way), who for well over twenty years ran the Galleria dell'Ariete, in Milan, and is now a contributing editor with Condé Nast Publications; Mimi Romanoff, who, under the name Mimi di N—— (she was born Mimi di Niscemi), is a talented and successful designer of costume jewelry, married to Prince Alexander Romanoff; Alexis Gregory, who is a publisher (the Vendome Press) and has recently become a shareholder and director of Sotheby's as well; and us. We were all going on to Brighton Beach, which is often referred to as Little Odessa, because close to ten thousand Soviet Jewish émigrés have settled there in the wave of the Third Emigration which began in 1970. We had a reservation for eight o'clock at a night club *called* Odessa, for dinner and dancing, and it was now close to nine.

"Do you want to join us?" Alexis Gregory asked a tall man with a mustache.

"I'm sorry, but I'm going home to cook for my wife," he said.

"How *nice!*" said Mimi Romanoff. "A man who goes home to his wife."

"And who can cook," said an unidentified passerby with a glass in his hand.

Alexis Gregory approached the producer-writer Chandler Cowles. "Would you like to come with us?" he asked.

Chandler Cowles immediately looked at his watch. "I'd love to, but I'm about to have dinner with my son and my daughter-in-law," he said. (His younger son, Matthew, is at present appearing in a revival of Clifford Odets' "Paradise Lost," and his daughter-in-law, Christine Baranski, is in Tom Stoppard's "The Real Thing.")

Interrupting Mimi Romanoff, who was deep in conversation, Alexis Gregory asked, "Are you coming, *Princesse?*"

A tall woman of great presence with long, wraparound eyes, Mimi Romanoff was dressed in black and brown—a black skirt printed in brown flowers, a black cashmere sweater with a flowering spray of rose diamonds pinned to the bosom, and, tightly bound about her head, a kerchief of the same print as her skirt.

Beatrice von Rezzori, a small, precise blonde, was all in black silk—wide trousers, satin slippers with delicate heels—and she had a mythical animal's head in gold studded with tiny stones at her throat. She exited. Her husband,