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## EDITORS' NOTE

# A Watcher of Human Foibles

William Zinsser, whose writing has appeared in LIFE off and on for eight years, is a distinguished reviewer, critic and novelist. This week, on page 12, he comments on a curious aspect of American life—the health-giving jog. Jogging is a sport that might otherwise have gone unnoticed, but Bill has been sharpening his sense of the ridiculous ever since he left the Army as a buck sergeant in 1946.

Zinsser warmed up for his trend-spotting career by reviewing movies for the late New York *Herald Tribune* for three and a half years. He is never one to write in anger, and he seldom panned a film viciously. "It's too easy to be cruel," he says. "I prefer to make my point by poking fun at something. A critic should have affection for the medium he writes about, and he ought always try to be fair." After 600 movie reviews and columns he quit the critic stint to write editorials for the paper, and in 1959 he left it to free-lance. In 1963 he used our pages to attack the prevalence of hair curlers; the article is still revered by husbands and fathers and recalled by him with amusement. "I like to think," he says, "that my piece put a tiny dent in this phenomenon and has slightly reduced the number, if not necessarily the size, of hair curlers worn by American women in public. Only last summer I saw a sign in a restaurant saying, 'No shorts or hair curlers allowed.' " His findings on this and other subjects later appeared in book form in *The Haircurl Papers* (Harper & Row, 1964). More recently, for LIFE, Bill has come out against crumbly hors d'oeuvres, zip codes and a record called *An Open Letter to My Teen-age Son*.



BILL ZINSSEER

Bill is not only a watcher of human foibles, he is a mine of trivia. Naturally, he knows his movies. He is just as authoritative about old show tunes (he knows every word of more than a thousand of them) and baseball lore (want to know the lineup of the 1931 Philadelphia Athletics?). But he is nobody's old nostalgist; he talks to the young. He admires Antonioni's *Blow-Up* and is a fan of the Beatles, the Jefferson Airplane and Simon & Garfunkel. And, as he would have to be, he is a good serious reporter. Next week, for example, we will publish a Zinsser article about the new building of the Ford Foundation.

Critics who have reviewed Bill's seven books call him a Social Observer, a term he shrinks from as pompous. Pomposity, after all, is just what he's against; he shoots it down with humor. "Humor," he says, "is the only way of calling attention to the absurdities we're inflicting on ourselves. The humorist has a harder time today than ever before. He has never seen so many outlandish things going on that people just take for granted. What I want to do is to make people laugh so that they'll see things seriously."



LIFE

BEHIND THE

# PEACE FEEELERS

- ▼ 1,000 leads **that failed**
- ▼ Exclusive account  
of a bizarre hoax
- ▼ Ho Chi Minh  
implacable—and why

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