

THE LAST WORD

One Thing We Can't Stand

By Jamie Buckingham

When little Mike was eight years old he went with his dad to the stock car races. On the way home his father was stopped by the police for speeding. Mike sat quietly, listening as his father explained to the officer that he was hurrying home because his father-in-law had just died and his wife was in hysterics. The cop waved them on.

"But, Daddy," little Mike said as they pulled away, "Pa-Pa died last year."

The father grinned. "It's okay, Mike, as long as they believe you."

Six months later Mike's mom was driving home from the grocery store when a beer truck dented her fender. Mike's dad was angry because he didn't approve of beer. "I'm going to make them pay good for this," he said righteously.

Mike stood quietly in the garage as his dad talked to the insurance adjuster. Mike's dad insisted the beer truck had not only dented the fender, but had crumpled the back bumper and cracked the glass in the back window—damage which had occurred a year earlier. The adjuster agreed to pay for it all.

After he left Mike's father said, "Serves those people right."

When Mike was 10 years old his Sunday school teacher took his class to the ice cream shop. The hostess took the whole group to a big booth at the back of the shop. There was a dollar bill and some change under one of the plates, left as a tip. Mike watched as his teacher glanced around, then folded the dollar bill and slipped it into his shirt pocket. He left the change on the table.

"That will buy you an extra milk-

shake," the teacher grinned at Mike.

When Mike was 11 his father stopped by to see the pastor of the church, who was building a new house. The pastor was unloading some roofing paper from the trunk of his car. He bragged to Mike's father that he had picked it up at a construction site nearby.

"You ought to see how much stuff they waste on that job," he said. "One of the carpenters gets this for me on Saturday."

"It's all part of the game, kid," the burly coach said. "Rules are made to be broken."

When Mike was 13 his mother took him on a train trip to see her brother in Minnesota. She told the ticket agent that Mike was only 12, so she could get half fare.

"It's okay, son," she said, "as long as you are little."

The next year Mike's Uncle Harry, an elder in the church, borrowed more money than he would repay. He sold his car and his house to Mike's parents. He also gave Mike's daddy a lot of money and told him to invest it for him. Then he went into bankruptcy to escape his creditors. Later Mike's parents sold the house and car back to Uncle Harry and helped him get his money from the investors. Then they all went to Colorado on a skiing trip.

"You've got to learn how to beat the system," Uncle Harry told Mike.

When Mike was 16 he made right tackle on the football team.

His coach showed him how to block and at the same time grab the opposing end by the jersey so the official couldn't see.

"It's all part of the game, kid," the burly coach told Mike. "Do you think I'd have made it as a pro player if I didn't know a few tricks? Rules are made to be broken. It's the smart kid who doesn't get caught."

When Mike graduated from high school he had offers from a number of major universities that wanted him to play football. He was afraid he could not play and still pass his grades.

"Listen," the smooth talking recruiter said to Mike over a juicy steak dinner in the fancy restaurant, "we got ways of getting you through school. You play for us and we'll see you get passing grades."

But Mike broke his leg during the opening game, and was dropped from the squad. The next semester, his grades tumbling, he got caught by the campus police stealing test answers from the dean's office. He was expelled from school.

"How could you shame us this way?" his mother wept.

"You really let us down," his father said with tight lips.

"And I thought you were going to be an all-American," his Sunday school teacher said.

"I was going to give you a job when you graduated," Uncle Harry said. "But you've really messed things up."

"Stupid kid," said his high school coach.

"Tch, tch," said the preacher.

If there's one thing we adults can't stand—it's a kid who steals and cheats. ☞