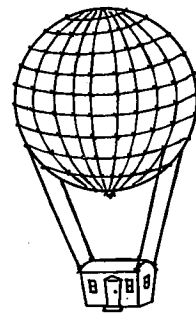


# Priced Off the Earth?

## —Try the Air



NEW YORK and other cities have long been losing their attractiveness for families, especially for those with children of school age. Those who could not afford private schools felt they would like their children to grow up in less racially mixed communities, and in surroundings where presumably one was more safe on the streets and where people in general were friendlier. But for those who still would have to commute to the city for business reasons, such a move was not an unmixed blessing.

Remorse and disappointment led to fiercely combative instincts in certain Eastern suburbs, according to a newspaper report, and a group of women in Darien, Connecticut, known as Suburbanites Anonymous, banded together for the purpose of stiffening each other's backbones enough to "withstand the temptations of the suburb and return to the city."

The modest \$25,000 split-level house, bleakly devoid of trees, which seemed alluring on the drawing board, is now so close to the neighboring house that there is nothing to see through the picture window but the family next door. It was hard to find a place to park in the city, but the problem in the suburbs is scarcely less acute—and suburban housing developments have "turned the concept of privacy into a joke."

School taxes in many instances have increased to the point where it would have been cheaper to stay in the city and send the children to a private school. And schools are so crowded in these fast-growing communities that many children can go to school only half a day.

Widely caricatured suburban fathers not only bear the weight of this financial burden, but with commuting an ever-increasing annoyance, there is less and less delight in life for them, and no time to see the younger children except on weekends.

But on returning, sadder and wiser, to the city they left, what do they find? The rent controlled apartment house in which they lived has given way to an enormous "poured concrete" structure with "lugshury" units renting at \$100 a room and up. The car will cost them a minimum of \$25 a month for the privilege of keeping it in a parking lot several blocks away, or double that amount for space in a garage. Some will still play the frolicsome game of trying to find parking space on the street, but this will entail endless tips to doormen, the inconvenience of observing alternate parking rules, and almost certainly an occasional \$15 ticket.

So they get rid of the car, but they still ask themselves why it should cost so much to live. The Ginks are a retired couple, too young to vegetate, they think, but too old to add to their income—and they begin to analyze just what the city is going to do for them in return for a steady outlay of rapidly shrinking dollars. They gradually become aware of the fact that they have been priced off the earth, at least that part of it which they formerly called home.

Sometimes fatigue can act as a mild intoxicant, and as they rested after a day of apartment hunting, painfully

calculated in terms of their retirement income, some spark of long submerged resiliency seemed to be trying to gain their attention.

There is really very little reason why we have to be on the ground, said the husband. In any week or even in a month, we see very few of our friends. Since they are all "busy" the best we can do is keep in touch by telephone. The theaters often prove disappointing, but in any case are now too expensive for our budget. Why do we have to rent space on this crowded globe, when even as short a distance as a mile away there is plenty of space, with presumably no rent and no taxes—the air!

It happens that the Ginks, although they had a houseful of furniture, had also been campers in their youth, so they knew it was possible to eat and sleep in a small area and still find enjoyment, with the sky for a canopy. They checked in at a hotel to rest and think. What started as a mixture of humor and desperation kept tugging at their imaginations. Even if they weren't serious, why not amuse themselves by drawing some plans? Roy Gink, as a boy, had once watched a balloon race and had never forgotten it. His wife had always coaxed her brother, a pilot, to teach her to fly. They affirmed to each other that they would be no more afraid of living in the air than they would be in a tent in the Maine woods.

So they made a rough draft of a balloon-basket home. Now if they could afford to have someone construct this one-room cabin, combining

the efficiency of a yacht and a trailer, and attach it to something that would keep them airborne, they could forget about landlords and taxes.

They discussed their plans with only one person, an executive in a construction company who could see good advertising possibilities in this fantastic idea even if it didn't prove practical. So he appropriated old equipment, considered hopelessly out of date in a jet propelled age, and the fantasy took shape with a minimum amount of the stalling now almost compulsory wherever labor is involved.

Meanwhile Mr. Gink had been making necessary arrangements and collecting information about "Air-living-room." Maps revealing the airways of passenger ships were carefully checked, for these were forbidden territory. Areas frequented by jet army and navy craft were equally to be avoided and those, while harder to chart, were surprisingly numerous.

Private planes and other craft were not welcome at any of the large airports, so attention was shifted away from large cities. They would need to land at least once a week to replenish food and water supplies and recharge batteries. They would also need an adequate communication system and hoped to find a friendly base where they could receive mail.

They began to feel as eager and adventuresome as the hardy emigrants who fled tyranny in the past. Driven from the earth with its menacing restrictions, they would be the first to pioneer on the newest frontier.

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**"Sea Cities" is the subject of a study made by Hilbert Van Nydeck Schenck, Jr., of the Mechanical Engineering Department of Clarkson College of Technology, and reported in The Clarkson Letter, Potsdam, New York, in December, 1960. He points out that about 29 per cent of the earth's surface is water and discusses the benefits of a "closed" (stationary submarine type) or "open" (gigantic diving bell) city under the sea, or perhaps in a lake or lagoon at the intermediate depth of from 36 to 120 feet. Less expensive than a space satellite, he says, and more promising.**