

## Arms Up!

By James Montgomery Jackson

These days my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher might be fired for holding the contest. In 1959, teachers had more leeway and kids didn't know how to sue.

Despite our teacher's admonitions, several of us would not settle down to classroom routine after our weekly Phys. Ed. escape--soccer in the crisp October air. I don't know if we were particularly rowdy, or if something else bothered him that day. He slammed his eraser in the chalk tray and told the class to stand. Giggling at the cloud of dust, we stood next to our desks.

"Here's a contest," he said. "No homework tonight for the winner."

That got our attention.

"Everyone hold your arms up like this." He demonstrated, extending both arms straight over his head. "You can talk or move around, but you have to keep your arms up. The last to drop is the winner. When you quit, you must sit silently at your desk...and you can start your homework."

After ten minutes, only four were standing. At the quarter hour, my shoulders ached and I interlocked my fingers for support. I knew I only had two guys to beat when the boy on my left sat down.

From his desk he whispered, "Jim. It's not worth it. It really hurts."

"I'm winning," I said.

From his observation post behind us the teacher snapped, "If you're seated, no talking."

Five minutes later, twenty-eight heads bent over their homework; two concentrated on winning, silently staring at each other--both prepared to become granite statues.

With thirty minutes gone, most of the class had finished their homework and become restless. The teacher walked to the front.

"You both win," he said. "No homework tonight."

Thrilled, I dropped my arms. I almost cried from the pain as blood coursed through my arms and hands, burning into my mind the lesson my friend had whispered. Not all victories are worth the price.