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My Childhood

by Malcolm Walker

Could my children inhabit my childhood world? Can I inhabit theirs? As an adult I cannot readily relate to either their world or the world of my grandchildren. What I can highlight is the certainty, joy and simplicity of mine. That is not to negate the presence in all of us our human failings, greed, lust, envy, jealousy, spite and so many more which pervade the childhood of every generation since time immemorial. Plus ca change.

“Come on Malcolm up you get. Time to get ready for school. Your breakfast is ready.”

“Oh Mum, not another boiled egg.”

“You know jolly well that we cant afford much and anyway it is all rationed, so drink your orange juice. I collected it from the local clinic yesterday. I'll meet you later at the dentist. Thank God that's free.”

“Do I have to go Mum, that drill hurts like hell.”

“You've already had so many teeth out, at least you might save the rest. You've still got a coupon for two ounces of sweets, perhaps you'd better leave off eating them. Now here's your dinner money, off you go, Gordon's waiting.

“Hello Gordon, we'd better get going. Still a mile to walk before we get to school. Here let's cut through the park, we might get time to play in the air raid shelter.”

“Next term, when we are 7 we will go into the juniors. Hey did you listen to Dick Barton last night?”

“Yes but a valve in the radio broke and I missed the end of it.”

“After Sunday school we can climb the fence around the orchard and go scrumping.”

“Yeah my parents insist we go to Sunday school but at least we can play in the cornfields until it gets dark. Didn't you help the milkman last Friday?”

“Yes, I had to get up at 5 o'clock and all the milk bottles were frozen. It took ages to open the front gates and plough through the snow but I did have a laugh when Mr. Carter's horse Dobbin opened his bottom and did his business as we raced back to the dairy. I've never seen such a flood of manure. Mr Carter told me off for being silly.”

“Malcolm! Come out here now. Always acting the fool. Stand in front of the class and hold out your hand.”

“Thwack.”

“Here look what the teacher's done. My hand's bleeding. I wont tell my Mum or Dad, they'll kill me.”

“Hey Flash Gordon is on on Saturday morning pictures.”

“Yes and Bugs Bunny. We're off to Devon immediately after for our summer holiday.”

“You're so lucky, I've never been away, apart from a few days with relatives in Doncaster.”

“Here, do you know what my geography master wrote in my report?”

“Could do better?”

“No, he wrote it's a wonder he finds his way to school.”

“Oh just like my history teacher who wrote “Gordon continues to attend lessons.”

“Now Malcolm you must do your best. It is vital you pass the 11plus next week. If you don't pass it could be a disaster.”

“I know Mum but many of the kids at school say they don't want to go to grammar school and their parents don't care either.”

“Well more fool them. You will get a good job for life with the Civil Service or a bank.”

A small snapshot I know, but dear reader you get the gist. Dad at work, Mum at home. No divorce, no single parent, no drugs, great freedom, respect for adults, limited resources and therefore less choice to confuse, no cars, no TV, no phones. Fewer people, more space, more discipline, more constraints, more innocence but above all a naive feeling that anything was possible.