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My Childhood – Another World

by Penny Humphrey

My childhood seems to belong to another world where every day was sunshine and there was only one type of shampoo – Drene, available from Herberts the chemist and wrapped carefully in brown paper taped at both ends, no such thing as conditioner then so it was tears over tangles.

The groceries came from the grocery shop, the vegetables from the vegetable shop and the meat from the butchers. The fish man, the baker, the laundry man, the milkman all arrived in various types of vans and the paper man arrived on a motor bike with a homemade sidecar painted silver.

It was all very simple really and if the grocer had had the effrontery to sell Drene shampoo from his shop or the butcher a few veg to supplement his income, there would probably have been pistols at dawn.

Of course there wasn't really wall to wall sunshine and life wasn't really that simple, it was complicated in other ways, trying to get enough heat out of a temperamental boiler to run the bath, banging the tele and shouting (as if that would help) when there was interference all through the summer months on the only channel available to Cornwall. Scraping the mould off the surface of the shoe polish before polishing the mouldy shoes. Everything went mouldy in the winter in that damp cold atmosphere if you left it alone for five minutes.

But the distance between now and then allows you to be selective about the times you remember, hence the sunshine, the trotting breathlessly over the cliffs to feel the warm sand on the soles of your sandals and the white foam edging the beach burying your feet up to the ankles as it played around you. Learning to swim and surf, feeling the freedom.

I remember being in Falmouth when I was six and being transfixed at the sight of a black man walking towards me, it was the first time I had ever seen anyone from a different culture and of course I was fascinated, I was told not to point as it was rude and to 'come here quickly and hold my hand' what did my aunt imagine the man was going to do?

I loved to go occasionally to the cinema to see the cowboy and Indian films; nothing like a good old battle between the uniformed United States Federal army with their rifles and bullets and those half naked pesky Indians with their bows and arrows. The fight wasn't over until every Indian was shot dead. Who did they think they were anyway? Just a lot of savages. Makes me wince to even think of it now but then, then was a different time.

So my childhood was innocent as childhood should be but the process of growing up was a steep learning curve. Now it seems that children are blasted into life from all angles. What will they remember when they look back? I hope it will be more than being tucked up in a corner flicking at a game consol.