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Urban Myth

by Sue Hitchcock

Well, Prince Andrew settled his court case with Virginia Giuffre over her claim of abuse. Who knows if he was guilty or if she was really a victim, but that's how the media like to present it nowadays. Things didn't always look this way. In the 1970's, the days of Flower power, sex was joy.

The recent history of attitudes to sex is a history of huge changes, in social change, in man's relationship with Nature, in human wealth. The long Victorian period was one where industrialization brought penury to peasants who had previously had natural resources to fall back on. The family was the only gift which was left to them and a high birthrate was only curbed by an equally high death rate among mothers and babies. Sex was a duty which women fulfilled at a risk to their own lives.

Meantime among the rich, women who saw greater numbers of men enfranchised considered it should be their right also and the Suffragette movement led them way to a Feminist movement. The luxury of a room of one's own was what Virginia Woolf needed.

The loss of so many men during the two wars made women realise that they had abilities which were equal to those of the men, but an image of comfortable domestication seeped into the public mind from Hollywood's technicolor images and the small family unit became the norm. Housing was built to accommodate exactly that. France's influence through films with the naughty Brigitte Bardot and the more serious ideas of Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex* opposed the American view. Young people looked for sexual freedom and loved the music of America, brought by the new West Indian arrivals.

The trigger for the beginning of a new world was the invention of the contraceptive pill. Pregnancy had been the main constraint on the behaviour of women, with the necessity of financial support when the child was young. If her parents were not willing to take on another child, when the woman's father was already looking forward to retirement, she needed to marry the father. Accommodation for single mothers was only discussed in Parliament in 1972.

They say, "If you can remember the seventies, you weren't there." but I was a mother of two small daughters and could only observe. At the playgroup, fathers were analysing their behaviour, trying to stop being "Male Chauvinist Pigs", as offenders were called by Feminists.

Gradually women earned better wages and early childcare became available. The consequence of this was that firstly women wanted to work, then child allowances were scrapped and finally it became mandatory for women to work, unless their partner was well paid.

Feminism had achieved a kind of equality, though how could a woman be happy? Men had to be guilty and complaints continued. Should men whistle at girls in the street? Should they make suggestions, when no hint of interest was shown? Could they touch even the shoulder, as they might have to a male friend?

"Me too" was the slogan as women searched their past for signs of unwanted contact. Was the touch a threat, or had she forgotten the smiling glance she had given? Everyone wanted to join the club, leaving men feeling rejected, unnecessary and resentful. Do women not realise their own part in the story?

So when Virginia Giuffre was offered a luxurious lifestyle in exchange for sexual favours, was she too young to be aware of the deal? Young women who got pregnant from fancying the boy-next-door were never treated so kindly.