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APPLEGATE OUTBACK: MY OPINION

Looking back

BY BOB FISCHER



Bob Fischer



When looking back, it's hard to believe that we have lived as long as we have.....My mom used to cut chicken, chop eggs and spread mayo on the same cutting board with the same knife and no bleach, but we didn't seem to get food poisoning.

My mom used to defrost hamburger on the counter and I used to eat it raw sometimes too. But I can't remember getting E-coli. As children we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pickup truck on a warm day was always a special treat.

Our baby cribs, toys and rooms were painted with bright colored lead based paint. We often chewed on the crib, ingesting the paint. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors or cabinets, and when we rode our bikes we had no helmets.

We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle. We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the street lights came on. No one was able to reach us all day. We played dodge ball and sometimes the ball would really hurt.

We played with toy guns, cowboys and indians, army, cops and robbers, and used our fingers to simulate guns when the toy ones or my BB-gun was not available. We ate cupcakes, bread and butter, and drank sugar soda, but we were never overweight, we were always outside playing.

Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't, had to learn to deal with disappointment. Some students weren't as smart as others or didn't work hard so they failed a grade and were held back to repeat the same grade. That generation produced some of the greatest risk-takers and problem solvers. We had the freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all.

Almost all us would have rather gone swimming in the lake instead of a pristine pool (talk about boring). The term cell phone would have conjured up a phone in a jail cell, and a pager was the school PA system. We all took gym, not PE...and risked permanent injury with a pair of high top Ked's (only worn in gym) instead of having cross-training athletic shoes with air cushion soles and built in light reflectors. I can't recall any injuries, but they must have happened because they tell us how much safer we are now. Flunking gym was not an option...even for stupid kids! I guess PE must be much harder than gym.

Every year, someone taught the whole school a lesson by running the halls with leather soles on linoleum tile and hitting the wet spot. How much better off would we be today if we only knew we could have sued the school system. Speaking of school, we all said prayers and the pledge and stayed in detention after school and caught all sorts of negative attention for the next two weeks. We must have had horribly damaged psyches.

I don't understand it. Schools didn't offer 14 year olds an abortion or condoms (we wouldn't have known what either was anyway) but they did give us a couple of baby aspirin and cough syrup if we started getting the sniffles. What an archaic health system we had then! Remember school nurses? Ours wore a hat and everything.

I thought that I was supposed to accomplish something before I was allowed to be proud of myself. I just can't recall how bored we were without computers, Play Station, Nintendo, X-box or 270 digital cable stations. I must be repressing that memory as I try to rationalize through the denial of the dangers that could have befallen us as we trekked off each day about a mile down the road to some guy's vacant lot, built forts, out of branches and pieces of plywood, made trails, and fought over who got to be the Lone Ranger. What was that property owner thinking, letting us play on that lot. He should have been locked up for not putting up a fence around the property, complete with a self-closing gate and an infrared intruder alarm.

Oh yeah...and where was the Benadryl and sterilization kit when I got that bee sting? I could have been killed! We played king of the hill on piles of gravel left on vacant construction sites and when we got hurt, mom pulled out the 48 cent bottle of Mercurochrome and then we got our butt spanked. Now it is a trip to the emergency room, followed by a 10-day dose of a \$49 bottle of antibiotics and then mom calls the attorney to sue the contractor for leaving a horribly vicious pile of gravel where it was such a threat.

We didn't act up at the neighbor's house either because if we did, we got our butt spanked...and then we got our butt spanked again when we got home. Mom invited the door to door salesman inside for coffee, kids choked down the dust from the gravel driveway while playing with Tonka trucks (remember why Tonka trucks were made tough...it wasn't so that they could take the rough playing in the family room), and dad drove a car with leaded gas.

Our music had to be left inside when we went out to play and I am sure that I nearly exhausted my imagination a couple of times when we went on two week vacations. I should probably sue the folks now for the danger they put us in when we all slept in campgrounds in the family tent.

Of course my parents weren't the only psychos. I recall Danny Reynolds from next door coming over and doing his tricks on the front stoop just before he fell off. Little did his mom know that she could have owned our house. Instead she picked him up and swatted him for being such a goof. It was a neighborhood run amok.

Summers were spent behind the push lawn mower and I didn't even know that mowers came with motors until I was 13 and we got one without an automatic blade-stop or an auto-drive. How sick were my parents?

To top it off, not a single person I knew had ever been told that they were from a dysfunctional family. How could we possibly have known that we needed to get into group therapy and anger management classes? We were obviously so duped by so many societal ills, that we didn't even notice that the entire country wasn't taking Prozac! How did we survive?

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