

What Ever Happened To Plain Fun

Having been born and raised in New York City, and a product of the forties as well, it annoys me to see some teen-agers hanging around the house.

For the life of me I can't figure out what great charge they get from listening to stereo records... the same records that they have heard a hundred times or so on every radio station.

What ever happened to plain fun, kids getting together and playing games? The great games like hide and seek, ring a levee, three men on a pony, checkers (played with bottle caps weighted with orange peels) and the best game of all...STICK BALL...are they lost forever?

Granted, there were a thousand kids on our street alone, and it wasn't ultra difficult to round up a few bodies to keep busy...but, we wanted to do something.

Stick ball was the closest we ever came to a manicured diamond and real baseball. Some of us had mitts, other didn't, but everybody played, regardless. The ball was a plain rubber tennis ball...without the fuzz. And the bat was a full length mop handle or broom handle, whichever was hanging lower on the fire escape. Come to think of it, we must have kept the mop and broom manufacturers mighty busy filling reorders for years. In a small way we were an asset to the economy.

Teams were selected after team captains were chosen. Members of each team could range in age from twelve to twenty and sometimes a grown, married guy would volunteer to play a base. At times like this, these were BIG, no fooling around games...every pitch was for blood.

Being thirteen or fourteen years old, during one such game, visions of being the game hero surely entered into all our thoughts. We all wanted to be a Joe DiMaggio, Johnny Mize, Phil Rizzutto and every other baseball hero of the day...if we could only get the chance.

I clearly remember coming up to the plate (drawn with chalk)...

By Joel Saperstein

Funny Side Up



all seventy pounds of me, in ripped Lee dungarees and soiled t-shirt, holding a mock bat cut from someone's favorite mop. The weathered bat was several inches taller than I, but bases were loaded, it was the last of the ninth...AND I WAS UP.

The mop handle on my shoulder was no mere stick. It was a club and I was joltin Joe D. I hit the next pitch not a mere two sewers or even two and a half sewers as per my usual clout, but a giant three sewers distance. It went up and it went far...breaking a third story window on its flight. No matter, the blast was a home run, and a skinny kid became a hero that day...equal to any big leaguer...and much more satisfying than sitting in a room listening to a record that I had heard one hundred times.

The kids I know really have it made in the shade...and they don't even realize it.

The poor, underprivileged, over-fed babes actually look forward to, and in fact insist upon, being banished to their room...their sanctuary away from the world at large.

In this room a ritual of self torture is inflicted. It couldn't be anything else. Nobody, but nobody would knowingly lock themselves in a small room, then proceed to turn the hi-fi up to maximum

audio. The walls quiver and paint begins to chip and fall. Even the family dog can't bury himself deep enough to avoid the ear shattering shrills being passed off as music.

Try and talk sense to these kids...impossible. After hours and hours of self torture how can you expect to penetrate eardrums that are only conditioned to function many octaves above terminal audio pollution?

Not so many years ago, my room was sort of a haven also. In it was one hi-rise bed, one dresser, one night stand and my only treasure... a small plastic AM radio that was encased in a field of static.

This radio was my escape. An escape out of a dirty, grimy New York neighborhood, overpopulated with kids and kids and kids. I listened enchantedly to The Green Hornet, Superman, The Lone Ranger, Jack Armstrong and the great comedy programs featuring Eddie Cantor, Danny Kaye, Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy, Fred Allen, Jack Benny and so many others.

The most harsh punishment for the young of my generation was pulling the plug on the radio. That was real torture...a mental whipping that took quite a while to get over.

Life today would somehow be impossible for a zillion kids, who pay \$15.00 each for the privilege of

being squashed together at a concert, just to see The Who, or The What, or The When, or The Where.

Parent strategy and all the "HOW TO COPE" books miss the target by miles. I think that our

sanity lies in the formulation of two organizations...open to all adults, "I DON'T CARE", by and for concerned parents and "LET'S ALL HOPE AND PRAY FOR MANKIND."

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