

## LET'S REWIND!

In today's revolving door of technology and media, a great part of our lives happens online, in a blur, while the real world rests in the little things – chapter of a book, chirp of a bird, flowers blooming out of frozen February ground.

If we go a little further in the past, we find creative ways to connect and play without technology. Technology does things *for* us while taking away *from* us – the creativity, imagination and boredom necessary to produce anything worth having.

When I hear my great-grandpa speak of his early years, it's as if I stepped into the Chronicles of Narnia – children playing, running carefreely and playing hide'n'seek, unaware that the place was bombarded.

He was born in 1936 and his childhood was marked by World War II.

Speakers in main streets served as means of communication, and his first personal contact with technology was the radio. Listening to it was considered illegal and dangerous, as you could have been accused of espionage. After 10 pm, they'd listen to Grga Zlatoper and the Voice of America, a reliable source.

They lived harmoniously with nature, enjoying the fresh air and clean water. Living by the river meant going fishing (both necessary and fun) and river tubing.

Social life took place in your backyard and around school. Boys played with boys, mostly football and card games. Older boys would do boxing, play raffle games and toss coins.

Parents and teachers carried knowledge, seldom questioned or mistrusted. School was the most important job.

Chores were vital – participating in any and all family efforts, from picking fruit to reconstruction. Children learned to be self-sustainable, which is something we aspire to do today, too. In the garden that I get to call ours today, my ancestors grew apples, cherries and apricots, for family and neighbours. Figs on a slice of bread? Something to hold you over.

My grandma, born in 1961, had a similar, albeit more carefree childhood. Televisions were expensive, so there were only few in their street. Neighbours gathered at those

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homes for special events, such as the Olympics narrated by Milka Babović. It was a communal experience, unlike today.

As far as telephones go, my great-grandpa had to buy a utility pole since he was the first person in the neighbourhood to own the device. Telephones had rotary dials and later, dials with push buttons. Today, using either would be considered an ASMR experience.

Days were filled with outdoor games, like elastics and dodgeball. Saturday matinees at the children's theatre and school trips, most of them free.

Boys and girls played together. Children were clever and well-read, empathetic and ready to help each other with homework.

My mum's family owned many devices, including a TV and a cassette player, not a big deal anymore. The TV was used for the obligatory evening cartoon and news, which also meant bedtime for children.

A VCR made the experience more interactive – anticipating, picking or waiting for the right movie. Once cassettes became more available, she'd record something for enjoyment at a later time. Being able to catch a part of her favourite song or an at-home conversation made her feel like a wizard. Once a source of fun, now an overflowing source of nostalgia – hearing your parents' young voices so many years later. Technology then was icing on the cake, used intentionally, never just background noise. Even later, when devices became smaller and omnipresent, such as an mp3 player, having music in your ears when out and about made life feel like a movie, and each playlist was thoughtfully curated.

Before the war, children spent most of their waking hours outside. Neighbours would play together, Red Rover, hopscotch and tag. Elastics = king. Free-roaming, tree-climbing children making mud cookies and having singing competitions. (Tajči, anyone?)

War and post-war time made them homebound. What is now known as a 'granny hobby' is what my mum believes kept her sane throughout that time. And is the reason why I can sew, knit and do embroidery, too.

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Technology was in my life from day one. My photos were taken and sent to family daily, but never posted online. A phone never kept me busy. I liked playing outside with my friends, mostly pretend play and games like tag and basketball.

My all-time favourite activity has been reading, so I always have a book with me. Reading has given me freedom, a wide vocabulary and a rich imagination that allows me to express myself in fun and creative ways.

We didn't even own a TV until I was 3 years old, but from then on, big screens were allowed and it was something else! I loved watching cartoons, especially the old school ones.

As I grew older, my parents would let me take a photo or a video. I never played games. I do use a smartphone nowadays, but only for keeping in touch with my family. And I enjoy listening to music in the shower (thank you, Bluetooth and Spotify).

In the past, when devices were hard to come by, they provided a shared user experience. Today, as they have gotten more accessible, we have gotten more isolated. Instead of the attraction of a colour TV that brought a community together, you are now left with a screen that fits the palm of your hand.

While many claim humanity has reached its peak, I think that may not be true. Even if we don't want to admit it, at some point we stopped caring and became more attached to devices. I hope we won't stay on this path because people are too closed-off and I'm honestly scared of not having anyone to talk to when I get older.

I would leave technology to adults who know how to use it as a tool, but keep it away from children who only use it for fun. Fun shouldn't be a given – it should come to you as part of a process – and rewinding means finding.