

The Day I Stopped Typing

I don't belong in this time. At least that's what I've been telling myself ever since a conversation with my neighbour.

I was waiting at the bus stop after school with my "friends", Anthony and Bridget. I looked at them, then at all the other teens, all on their phones. I asked Bridget a question to get her to talk, but the only reply I got was, "I don't know, ask Anthony." But he was completely silent as usual. He only looked up from his phone to check if our bus was in sight.

"It must've been so much better in the olden days, before technology replaced people," I thought.

Then I saw the old lady who lived down the road from me. She was always talking to somebody. "I wish I had been born when she was," I told myself, "Life must've been so much better."

The bus arrived, and we all got on board. The seats quickly filled up, except for one or two rows.

"Is this seat taken?" It was the old lady.

"No," I answered as I moved my schoolbag onto my lap.

She sat down. "You're Amy Irwin, right? You live up the road from me?" she asked.

I looked up and confirmed, "Yes, that's me," and for a few minutes we sat in silence.

Suddenly, I felt the urge to ask her about her youth. It was a strange question to ask a neighbour with whom I had never spoken, but I couldn't stop myself. "What was growing up like for you, before the massive use of phones and other technology? Would you consider it better than how we teens live now?"

"Oh, I have to think about that." I could see she was a bit stunned. After a minute or two, she spoke:

"The highlight of my youth was the 80s. I finally started going out and meeting people. I remember my friends and I would spend every weekend doing something together. We had to plan ahead and in person. We'd go to discos, and have fun just moving with the beat. The music was always lively and the atmosphere energetic. Singers my friends listened to included Michael Jackson, Madonna, Prince, Whitney Houston, Billy Joel and Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of QUEEN. Although I loved all these singers and artists, the ones I listened to the most were German groups like Modern Talking and Alphaville, and some British bands like Tears for Fears. Someone's music taste defined their style and divided them into certain subcultures. I loved seeing different groups of people: the goths, the punks, the skater boys and girls, the hip-hoppers; all expressing themselves."

"That sounds nice," I cut in.

"It was. I remember spending ages making my hair appear as big and puffy as possible. My mother would always go mad when I told her I needed more hairspray; I was spending a whole can of hairspray a week! During the winter, my friends and I went to cafes and chatted over coffee. We'd gossip about who was dating and who was going on holidays and where. We'd take pictures together. Our selfies were called photographs, and you had to wait days to see if you looked deranged. School was a battlefield, though. Corporal punishment was considered

normal, and it was quite common. Anyone who didn't do exactly what the teacher asked was a target. Homework was much harder for my generation because we didn't have GPT chatter or whatever you use these days. We had to go to the library to get our information. I think that we were much more resourceful than teens now."

I nodded. What she said reminded me of the time I started talking to Bridget about how much time I spent putting together a text for my geography project. She cut me off by saying, "Why would you waste your time on that?" She proceeded to show me how to use AI, as if I was some kind of alien. Since then, whenever I had anything to say, I'd type it on my laptop. It became my closest friend.

"And to answer your second question," she carried on, "I think you should think about it on your own. You could come by my house to tell me what you've concluded."

The bus came to a halt.

"I'll visit you as soon as I have an answer!" I yelled as we went our separate ways.

As soon as I got home, I did some research on my beloved laptop and took down notes. Here is what I wrote:

Gen Zers are revisiting the music of Gen Xers and Millennials. Fashion is changing constantly, and there is no single distinctive style of dress tied to today's teens. In fact, today's generation seems to be returning to the past in terms of hair, fashion, music, makeup and so on. Vintage items are considered cute and aesthetic. (My mom is both proud and offended that her old clothes are now cool.)

The world hasn't changed much either. There are still wars, political and physical, just the countries have changed. I see we haven't learned a thing from the past.

The only major thing that has changed is our dependence on phones. Now, teens don't communicate, and when they do, it's short questions and one-word answers or emojis over text. People have become emotionless, like robots.

My conclusion? Older generations were better and more resourceful. Yes, living is so much easier with technology than without it. The problem is that we can't live without it at all anymore. We have become too dependent on it. We're creating artificial minds that think for us. We're creating replacements for us. As useful as technology is, I think we should restrict its use and improvement.

That's why I believe I don't belong in this time.

I stopped typing. I closed my laptop, I finally had someone real to talk to, someone who was willing to listen.