

Another Brick in the Wall

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I remember very well the first time I went to an institution for higher learning. I was unaware that I would learn anything because I thought I knew it all. Mother told me how much fun I would have meeting and playing with the other children at the Speedway Christian Church kindergarten. And to this day I have not disputed her theory. She was, as she always was, wrong. But I was disciplined to never question her.

I walked into the kindergarten with my mother and noticed the three women who were to become my teachers. The three teachers all seemed happy to see me. They didn't know me, I thought, so why were they so happy to see me? This was a question I should have contemplated, but I was too young to burden myself with such thought. I assumed that my devastating personality and genius level IQ were the reasons for their excitement.

The teachers, as I pictured all teachers, were old. The three were in the prime of their teaching careers with an average age of 81. My teacher was younger than the other two. She was 74 and her name was Mrs. Grey. We couldn't sneak anything past her. From her many decades of teaching, she knew all the tricks we attempted. Mrs. Grey always snuffed out our rebellions before we could overthrow her. For these reasons, I soon came to detest her, as well as other old people in general (excluding my grandparents, of course), and finally I grew to dislike the color gray itself.

Mrs. Grey yelled constantly at everyone and at the same time no one. Her fingers were crooked like the hairline from her wig. Whenever she pointed and yelled at a troublemaker, she actually was pointing at some little girl who never did anything wrong. Mrs. Grey could often be seen beating a child, usually a boy (don't all teachers hate boys?) with her dreaded paddle. She held the paddle as if it were a perfect extension of her hand. This infamous paddle was made by a blacksmith who was unaware of how his creation would be used. He, no doubt, thought it would be a conversation piece like many other medieval weapons he had made. I know for a fact that even today grown men who had Mrs. Grey as a teacher still awake from nightmares of the paddle which torment their sanity.

The paddle, as I remember it, embodied small circles of sharpened needles which caused a blistering effect on the area struck. The

opposite side had large electrodes which burned the victim. When Mrs. Grey's arthritis was in remission she could change sides with each strike. We called this the B-B effect; blister-burn, blister-burn. Optional leather straps could be used when crowd control was deemed necessary. Fortunately for us, her aim was rather poor. Mrs. Grey hit herself more than she hit troublemakers.

The child who best knew the paddle was Tim Goddard. Tim was labeled a "one of those" by the teachers. A "one of those" can do nothing right in the eyes of the teacher. Mrs. Grey beat him everyday simply for showing up. One day Tim made the mistake of pulling a girl's hair. And this girl happened to be one of Mrs. Grey's favorite boot-lickers. I distinctly remember hearing Tim's screams as he was beaten by the paddle. Tim never returned. Many years later I saw Tim in a bar. He was in a wheel chair. I figured it was from that excruciating day. I began to approach him but stopped, reasoning that seeing my face might induce flashbacks too horrible for him to bear. There was, however, one good thing about Mrs. Grey, and that was that she was the nicest teacher there. The other two teachers, Mrs. Feeble and Mrs. Decrepit, were so mean they maimed more than half of their students. Mrs. Grey maimed only a few, and did it humanely.

After observing Mrs. Grey, I attempted to become integrated into this nose-running, pants-wetting, and pencil-chewing population of room number seven. There were many different types of children at the kindergarten: funny kids, quiet kids, loners (which was what I was), talkers, and of course, teacher's pets. Some boys were more liked than others but no boy was ever given the title of teacher's pet. That title was reserved for girls who loved the teacher. The girl who was chosen head Boot-Licker was named Melissa Smith. Melissa not only genuflected in front of Mrs. Grey's desk, she lectured regularly that we, as a class, should canonize Mrs. Grey. Like all teachers, Mrs. Grey loved this treatment and encouraged Melissa to "keep up the good work." Mrs. Grey allowed Melissa to daily kiss her feet. Melissa's love for Mrs. Grey ended as the school year went on. She developed a severe case of athlete's tongue from smooching Mrs. Grey's toes.

I knew absolutely no one when I entered the school and soon came to realize it would stay this way by my own choice. Being intellectually superior to the other students, I thought associating with them would only lower my high standards. Even as a child I had my priorities.

Since I did not hang around any of the kids, most of my time was devoted to playing with the games or going to the rest room. The toys were donated by families who had 12 kids and were so thankful to get

rid of the last one that they gave all the toys to the one place that couldn't reject them, the Speedway Christian Church. Needless to say, the toys were not in working order. Why play the games, I'd ask myself, when the dice spinners and playing tokens were missing? They just didn't challenge me. The toys weren't much better. How much fun can a child have with a Big Wheel that has no big wheel? The only entertainment left for me was to pick up the crayolas. I was above average and could crayon one hell-uva Scooby-Doo. I had dreams of my pictures being compared to the Mona Lisa or the Last Supper, but Mrs. Grey told me in her infamous yelling voice that my pictures would not make it past her closet door. I was crushed. I gave up my artistic ambition and resorted to watching the others entertain themselves. Some of the boys played with blocks, others played with cars, a few who were low on the development scale simply sat, stared, and let snot drip under their noses. The girls did whatever girls do. (I felt like a scientist studying the habits of immature and lower life forms.) So, there was only one choice left for entertainment.

Bathroom time, a high spot in my day, was fun because Mrs. Grey did not have control over us. We could be little boys again. I often witnessed two rowdies causing trouble in the bathroom. The rumpus would make Mrs. Grey come into the bathroom with her cane poised in the striking position. But Mrs. Grey's big mistake was howling her tribal war scream before she entered the rest room, which would warn us to mobilize, separate, and look surprised. She would see 15 little boys and myself (I was above the little boy stage) all at an equal distance apart, with their pants half zipped, looking surprised.

Despite its foibles I knew this kindergarten business would have one bright spot when I was forced to sleep in a co-ed room. Actually nobody forced me to do it; I enjoyed seeing the girls in the Wonder Women Underoos. I even managed to sleep on the girls' side a couple of times and I never spent the time with the same girl. I was one suave dude. Nap time taught me two things, which over the course of my life I have treasured, defended, and preached. I never fully realized these two qualities until I graduated into the first grade, which was where I belonged. The first lesson was that it is proper to sleep at school. I've done it all my life. Teachers are always attacking me for it, and these same teachers also say I musn't forget what I learned in my earlier grades because we build on the things we have studied. The second quality I learned was that I could sleep with girls and not get into trouble. I cannot, however, convince my mother to agree with me on this.