

29th December 2021

Childish

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when became an adult, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”

Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:11,12

Up to Christmas, I've been writing about my early years – recording memories before they get lost, and making sure they're passed on to future generations. There are *big* things in my reminiscences. But there are lots of little things too which pop up in memories of childhood.

When, for example, did I learn that for a nettle-sting you rub the affected area with a “docken” leaf (the Dock plant, a from the genus *Rumex*) and the sting goes away, and that's why stinging nettles and docken plants grow side-by side? Who showed me that the strong rushes on the bank of the canal make excellent swords, and you can make a handgrip if you weave rushes together properly? Why did I learn to tell the time by blowing the spores from the head of a dandelion in the right season of year, the number of “puffs” needed giving you the hour of the day? Can you *really* tell if someone likes butter by holding a buttercup under their chin to see what kind of reflection there is on their skin?

If St Paul is right, in adulthood we should depart from childhood ways. I'll just thole the irritation of a nettle-sting now. I don't make swords out of rushes, tell the time from dandelions or ascertain people's preference for butter using flowers. Because ... “I gave up childish ways”.

But *all* childish ways? What about respect, honesty, fairness, compassion, sensitivity, and other values I learned from parents and others like them? I can't give up *these* precious things from childhood, can I?

Back then I only knew “in part”. My adult learning has been working out what to keep and what to leave behind, what should last and what was only suitable for childhood. At the age of seventy-two, I'm still learning, and I don't understand everything I need to. I hope I'm getting there. But there again, I might still teach my grandsons how to cure a nettle sting with a docken leaf when there are no antihistamine tablets to hand.

A prayer for today

Lord, do I have to give up my childish ways altogether? Can't I mix them into my adult learning and keep being a full and rounded person? I hope so! Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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