



Life and Education During the Great Depression

But I know that God has kept me around for a purpose, and I suspect that He wants me to keep doing what I have been doing for the last 40 years: writing mainly about education and promoting homeschooling.

How different is education today from what it was when I first attended a public school back in New York City in the early 1930s! That was during the Great Depression, but I don't remember anyone I knew being depressed. My father was in the produce business; thus, we always had plenty of food on the table. My mother actually made her own noodles for chicken soup. She also made her own gefilte fish (stuffed fish), which tasted a lot better than the bottled variety they sell in today's supermarkets. I was also able to walk to school and come home for lunch, which consisted of a fried egg sandwich and a glass of milk. I remember admiring the smiling policeman who stopped traffic so that we could cross the avenue on our way to the neighborhood school.



On Saturdays my friends and I went to the movies. Price of admission? Ten cents. In those days a penny could get you a Tootsie Roll, a package of gum, a bun. Five cents could get you a great tasting hotdog.

At school we all sat in desks bolted to the floor. The desks were arranged in rows so that you saw only the back of the head of the pupil in front of you. If you coughed, you didn't cough into anyone's face. Today, with kids seated around tables, they are constantly coughing into each others faces and spreading disease. A small price to pay for progressive collectivist socialization.

Back then, the teacher had her desk at the front of the class and she taught us all the same thing. There was no such thing as an "individual learning plan." We learned to read with phonics because it was the Depression and the schools could not afford the new Dick and Jane look-say books. We were taught penmanship, cursive writing, which helped us learn to read and spell because it taught us directionality and manual discipline. By connecting the letters in a word, we learned the word's spelling and how different combinations of letters made different sounds.

In elementary school we were taught arithmetic, not math. Arithmetic is a counting system. In addition you count forward. In subtraction you count backwards. In multiplication you count forward in multiples, and in division you count backwards in multiples. The teachers knew then that only by memorizing the arithmetic facts could you become efficient at using this ingenious place-value counting system. Because it uses only nine numeral symbols plus zero for all calculations, it is essentially a



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memory system. And so we memorized the arithmetic tables. Mathematics, which deals with the relationship of quantities, came later.

Of course, some of us learned the 3Rs better than others. Some of our teachers were not terribly good at teaching. Others were great, and we loved them. I remember being humiliated in front of a class because, for some reason, I could not remember some simple arithmetic function, and that angered the teacher.

From that experience, I have always advised tutors and homeschooling parents never to get angry when a child is having difficulty learning something. Be patient, and explain what it is that you want the student to learn. The brain is a very remarkable instrument and can do both amazing and silly things — often at the same time!

So we all learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. And because we could read, we then learned history and geography. We learned all about the history of New York and its five boroughs. Even though economic times were tough, it was a happy time for us kids. No one had dyslexia, or ADD, or ADHD. No one was on Ritalin. There was no sex ed or death ed or drug ed, no multiculturalism, no values clarification, no secular humanism. The schools did not try to undermine our religious beliefs or morals. They were teaching us to become good patriotic Americans. Since most of us came from immigrant families, becoming good Americans was very important. The only decoration in our classroom was a portrait of George Washington. Moreover, biblical religion was respected, and the principal recited the 23rd Psalm at each assembly.

In third grade, we had music appreciation. The teacher brought out her hand-driven Victrola and a stack of records from the closet and played classical music for us. I still remember some of the pieces she played: "The Swan" by Saint-Saens. "March Slav" by Tchaikovsky. And I know that that's where I acquired my taste for classical music.

So I had a very decent primary and elementary education. Indeed, the public school was an institution that instilled great patriotic values and love of country. They did not dumb us down; they lifted us up. But those days are long gone, and today I tell parents: Do not put your child in a public school. If you want to preserve their mental sanity and their love of learning, teach them at home.

Today's public schools have become criminal enterprises where children's brains are deliberately crippled by whole-language and look-say, where drugs are pushed on millions of children who must ingest Ritalin, where a child's religious beliefs are undermined by the practices of behavioral psychology, where pornography is foisted on the students in the name of sex education, where money is extorted from taxpayers to pay for the dumbing down of the future generation. Children in such a system will suffer lifelong deficits, and that is why homeschooling is such an important alternative, and why homeschoolers should bless their parents for keeping them out of such a harmful system.

Nowadays, young people are being persuaded that all of society's ills are being caused by greedy capitalists and those rich people who don't pay their "fair share" of taxes. The criminality of a government that is spending us into bankruptcy is not mentioned in the propaganda being spewed by the mainstream media. And because they have been so badly dumbed down by their government schools, they are incapable of exercising any kind of critical analysis of what is really going on. They react by emotion, consider fantasy as a form of objective knowledge, and look at reality as a TV show. In short, they are incapable of dealing with the real problems of our society because they've been denied the academic tools required to solve them.



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My generation grew up to become America's Greatest Generation that was able to defeat the Nazis and the Japanese in World War II, create our high-tech economy, and become the richest nation in history. The latest liberal generation may be the one that ends America's greatness by turning this great constitutional Republic into a debt-ridden, socialist swamp run by imbeciles. In 1933, nobody thought that Adolf Hitler could turn Germany into a genocidal monster in six years. In 2008, not many thought that Barack Obama could change America from being the world's leading economic power into an economic disaster. That's what he has been able to do in the first three years of his first term. Not bad for America's most socialist President.

Barack Obama, no matter how much damage he does to this country, will not be the end of America. Today, Germany is a far cry from what it was from 1933 to 1945. Japan has become a formidable technological success with a democratic government. South Korea has emerged from devastation into one of the most advanced and productive countries in the world. Russia has survived 75 years of communism and has become a more capitalist society. So America is by no means finished. But many will suffer because of the sins of the past and because true recovery may take several new generations with their heads screwed on right. It is easier to rebuild a nation destroyed by bombs. It is more difficult to repair the damage done to the brains of millions of children by their schools.



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