

We made it?

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For latest news, see "Who is doing what?"

I can't believe WE made it!
A little reality for all of us...

If you lived as a child in the 40's, 50's, 60's or 70's, looking back, it's hard to believe that we have lived as long as we have...

As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pickup truck on a warm day was always a Special treat.

Our baby cribs were covered with bright coloured lead-based paint. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors, or cabinets, and when we rode our bikes, we had no helmets - not to mention hitchhiking to town as a youngster! We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle. Horrors.

We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then ride down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times we learned to solve the problem.

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back in time for tea. No one was able to reach us all day. No cell phones. Unthinkable.

We played rounders and sometimes the ball would really hurt. We got cut and broke bones and broke teeth, and there were no law suits from these accidents. They were accidents. No one was to blame, but us. Remember accidents?

We had fights and punched each other and got black and blue and learnt to get over it. We ate cupcakes, bread and butter, and drank cordial but we were never overweight...we were always outside playing.

We shared one lemonade/raspberry or orange fizzy with four friends, from one bottle and no one died from this.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendo 64, X-Boxes, video games at all, 99 channels on cable, video tape movies, surround sound, personal cell phones, Personal Computers, Internet chat rooms ... we had friends.

We went outside and found them. We rode bikes or walked to a friend's home and knocked on the door, or rung the bell or just walked in and talked to them or played board games, or did jig-saw puzzles.

Imagine such a thing. Without asking a parent! By ourselves! Out there in the cold cruel world! Without a guardian. How did we do it?

We made up games with sticks and tennis balls and ate worms and although we were told it would happen, we did not put out very many eyes, nor did the worms live inside us forever.

We tried out for school Sports Teams and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't, had to learn to deal with disappointment...

Some students weren't as smart as others so they failed a grade and were held back to repeat the same grade.....Horrors. Tests were not adjusted for any reason. Our actions were our own. Consequences were expected. No one to hide behind. The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke a law was unheard of.

Parents actually sided with the law, imagine that!

This generation has produced some of the best risk-takers and problem solvers and inventors ever. The past 50 years has been an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all.

You are one of these.

Congratulations!

Please pass this on to others who have had the luck to grow up as kids, before lawyers and government regulated our lives, for our own good!!!

Dear Ian Lewis,
Merry Christmas from Ray and the Woodlore team!

Winter is an important season in the wild, it is a testing time. As the fingers of frost reach into the naked branches of the forest, so too comes death. The weak or the infirm creatures of nature are tested to see whether or not they will drink in the returning warmth of the next Spring.

In some native societies it was traditional during the Winter, to make a Winter Count, a time to look back over past years each of which was recorded by one particular event and to choose an event to represent the year just passed. For me this has always been a Christmas activity, perhaps because it is one of the calmest times in my own calendar. As I look back this year there are many memories.

We had to cancel the Arctic Experience due to the knock-on effect of the dreadful events of September 11th 2001, which was clearly the most important event of the previous year. Despite this, 2002 has been a particularly enjoyable year for me, having taken a year out from the maelstrom of television work to spend a year teaching in the UK.

It was wonderful to touch base with our seasons and students again. I have particularly fond memories of watching the Spotted Flycatchers raising their family in the oak canopy above one of our Sussex camps and perhaps even more so the lonely morning when they were not there. It is wonderful how migratory birds know the moment to begin their epic flights. A poignant precursor to the Autumn.

As I leaf through my memories of the year I realise how lucky we were, for most of the atmosphere is one of warm weather. Less testing perhaps than rain but certainly welcome.

Other special moments were the fox that walked over and introduced himself to one of our Woodsense courses and the tracks of newborn fallow deer that are such a powerful symbol of the continuity of nature. They always remind me that life is short and that we must make the most of every waking moment.

Continuity is at the forefront of my mind this Winter Count. This year I visited a Family Bushcraft course to find an adult with a familiar face, an old Woodloorean who nine years earlier had attended a Woodlore Foundation course. At the time I had asked him why he was there. His particular motive had been to learn the skills of bushcraft so that he would be able to share this with his family. I asked him how many children he had. He said, none but he was planning to. Shortly after his course we received a card informing us that his wife had just conceived. This year he brought his eight year old daughter with him to a course, an event that made most of us feel considerably older than we would have liked! But which also, like the footprints of the baby fallow deer, reminded us of the importance of the continuity in bushcraft.

Ray Mears Campaign for Adventure - Risk and Enterprise in Society