



ESCAPE TO THE SEVENTIES

The Seventies and ACTUAL reality vs. virtual reality.

Written by Gail Walter

Now, consider the seventies. Yes, there were televisions, telephones, record players and airplanes, but technology wasn't nearly as dominant as it is today. There were spaces and places that were completely without gadgetry. You could go on long drives in the country and absolutely no-one could contact you and remind you of your responsibilities.

This is what many of us remember about growing up in the Seventies. It was vivid and dynamic but we weren't being eaten alive by a pace that left no space for wonder.

In the seventies there were still places that you walked to and walked through – that weren't necessarily malls. And when we walked around we didn't have little speakers hooked to each ear playing our 500 song playlist from the Ipod attached to our waists.

We wore no electronic gadgetry around our persons which left space for accessorizing. The only thing around our waists were belts; macramÉ, bead, suede belts with long tassels that brushed against our denim clad thighs when we walked.

We loved music, make no mistake, but the soundtrack tended to be shared rather than fed into the very private world between our ears. There were headphones, and they were cool, but they were also not meant to be portable. They were something that you plugged into while you lay full length and spaced out on the brown shag carpet in your parent's living room.

When I was fourteen-years-old I had a crush on my best friend's brother. He was four years older than us and terribly sophisticated by comparison. I used to sleep over at Susan's house just so that I could spend the night in the room next to his.

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He'd spend the night listening to music and the sound would seep through the house walls so that I knew exactly what kind of music he liked. He listened to a lot of Beatles tunes and I learnt to distinguish which songs went on which albums from the experimental White Album to the carefree Please, Please Me.

One night things changed. Susan's brother's name was Clive. That day he had bought a pair of headphones and that night no music seeped through the adjoining bedroom walls. At first there was just this mysterious silence which felt odd. This was followed by something much weirder.

Suddenly the night was filled with a sort of monotonous keening sound, the sound a tone-deaf animal would make if it were hurt. At first we froze, unable to work out what the appropriate response would be. The sound grew louder until it only resembled the keening in just one way; it was still horribly sinister and monotonous, but now it sounded like buffalo bellowing, even to someone who had never heard buffalo bellowing.

Finally we summoned enough courage to climb out of bed and move towards the source of the unearthly sounds which were coming from the dark mouth of Clive's bedroom. We feared he'd been attacked by something nocturnal. Nothing could have prepared us for the sight we saw when our eyes got used to the dim interior.

There on the bed lay Clive, resplendent in a tattered T-shirt and under shorts. Wrapped around the top half of his head were the biggest pair of headphones we'd ever seen. He had his head thrown back and no doubt imagined that he was singing along with the Beatles. Something unforgivable happens to a person when they cannot hear their own singing. Tone, tune and melody are clearly, and unforgivably, a function of hearing your own voice.

This was my most vivid memory of seventies technology. It also marked the end of my first one-sided love affair. There would be many more...

Because we lived in a world with comparatively little virtual reality we found ourselves unquestionably falling back on ACTUAL reality, which was not a bad thing. For starters we spent more time in the park on the swings than our counterparts do today. Even as teenagers in heavy overcoats we'd drape ourselves over the play equipment in our humble little neighbourhood parks, late at night, after an exhausting search for elusive nightlife.

On weekends we went on picnics and cuddled on blankets spread out in dappled afternoon sunshine. There was less instant stuff so our picnic baskets contained real sandwiches and pork sausages and boiled eggs as well as marshmallows for roasting and little segments of processed cheese wrapped in foil and arranged in an attractive, round, cardboard box.

Going swimming was a real outing we spent hours playing imaginary games and sunning ourselves on the rough surface next to the pool. Visiting the library too filled hours of a weekend day, for those of us who loved the written word.

Flea markets were great places to hang out when we wanted to feel cool. The incense heavy air smelt like a thousand exotic places and record albums, candles, posters, cheesecloth smocks and secondhand overcoats from frozen northern climes could be purchased at half the price.

There were very few music shows on television in those days so whatever there was we watched. There was no such thing as MTV running 24 hours of raunchy music video. In the Seventies music wasn't something you watched, it was something you listened to and danced along with. It was easier to lose yourself in the music then. Back then our TV and movie role models were slim and attractive but not moulded as they are today. Yes, somehow, it was so much easier to keep things in perspective...

