

Sex and Money

You'd think by now, at my age, I'd be better at it. Not sex, which once I was, though now I'm out of practice, but money - because when I was young we had very little of it.

My parents never spoke of either money or sex in my presence. I don't recall ever pining for anything to the extent that I pleaded, except for a baby brother or sister which involves both money and sex, which I wouldn't before the age of at least sixteen have dreamed my parents would have indulged in. Even when I found condoms in my father's sock drawer. What was I doing in there anyway? And I told my cousin and he told my aunt and she told my mother and my mother told me, "Never mind what they are. It's private and keep out of our drawers." My dad wasn't present for this pronouncement.

When I think of my parents planned parenthood stance, I know their decision to have only one child would have a lot to do with money, or the lack thereof. They both knew, coming from large families, in my father's - nine children, in my mother's - six, how hard it would be in depression times, and must have resolved they would have more time and wherewithal for one child than for a flock. I was born in 1928.

I don't think I got allowances till I was six. Five cents a week, not for school supplies, maybe jaw breakers or hideous pink and white false teeth which disintegrated into flaky bits which stuck to the roof of my mouth. I don't recall my parents ever paying me to do odd jobs or deduct from my allowance because I didn't make my bed or hang up my pajamas or get all A's on my report card (which is fortunate because I rarely did.) We didn't pay *our* children for good marks or for promising to not smoke before they were twenty-one. I sometimes think these bribes would have been a good

idea, after watching neighbors' success in this field.

When I was a child I would be sent to the Red and White store for a loaf of bread or half a pound of bacon, but was not given money since we ran a tab. I've found at the back of one of my mothers' cookbooks, in her beautiful script, small wavering lines of "expenses:....January 1928", eight months before my birth where noted was "budget, 1st week - \$3.00" and "November 1929", when I was fifteen months old - "total - \$50.00", . What I now know, but didn't then was not only did they have difficulty paying the rent on their little pink bungalow and likely the Red and White grocery bill too.

When I was older, and visited my Aunt Ruby who worked in the millinery department of Johnston Walkers, she would take from her long black double -handled bag, a grubby change purse with a metal squeeze-twist closing. From it she would extract a quarter with a picture of King George the fifth on it and tell me to "buy treats or go to a show". Then the change purse would snap shut, and she would plop it back into the depths of her bag. A small cloud of pale pink powder would puff onto the front of her black crepe dress. I would thank her, and setting a pattern, rush off to spend the rare quarter as fast as I could..

*A cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.
Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere's Fan, 1893*



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