

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KIDS TODAY?

By Fred Hobbs

It's not certain what methods stone-age parents used in rearing their children. They couldn't rely on much advice from ages past, trained child psychologists, Dr. Spock, Dr. Phil or even Dear Abby.

Historically, opinions on the subject have come from a variety of sources. The Bible tells us, in Proverbs, "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Oscar Wilde had a decidedly cynical approach. In one of his works, he wrote: "Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them."

Aging into the role of grandparents and often great-grandparents, it's common to observe the behavior of today's children with a jaundiced eye. What in the world are they doing? We didn't do that in my day. What's the matter with kids today?

Of course, this is nothing new. The great thinkers of the past were as perplexed as we are in the 21st century about the complexities and bewilderment surrounding the younger generation. What is most challenging today is the ever-changing whirlwind environment in which children must navigate. Today's dramatic advances in technology and communication. Texting. Blogging. Tweeting. I-pods. Google, Droid and Wi-Fi. And every day seemingly overloaded with planned activities giving kids less time to view the butterflies, to lie on the grass and watch the clouds go by, or just to relax and "chill out."

While we can fret and stew over the consequences of the state of childhood in America today, a look at specific anecdotal evidence is illuminating.

I have five grandchildren. One is a 13-year old who is autistic and has special problems, though he is a whiz at the computer. A wonderful modern tool he would not have been able to use a generation earlier. My oldest grand-daughter, also 13, who proclaims she does not want to be a nurse or a teacher, but an Egyptologist. She researches on the Internet and prints out maps and pictures of ancient Egypt. Her six year old cousin who loves to read uses an amazing electronic tablet from her school that flashes in vivid color the new words she is supposed to learn. My 16-year old grandson is learning Spanish through some kind of "app" on his cell phone to supplement his study of the language in high school. And, a not quite so ambitious 11-year old plays computer games that hopefully will provide some educational benefit. All of them are involved in various sports from soccer to swimming, to baseball and hockey.

Piano lessons and sleep-overs are part of the routine, too. In short, they are still just normal kids despite the fast pace of today's shrinking globe.

The concern and perhaps fear many people have for the future of today's children, while natural, seems vastly overblown.

So, what IS the matter with kids today? That's actually the title of a song in the Broadway and Hollywood musical called "Bye, Bye Birdie." But as the father figure in the tale finally admits after reeling off a litany of frustrations he has with a teenage daughter: "Nothing is wrong with kids today." The real problem they face is growing up to be adults!