

## Childhood

*by Harry Zirkelbach 01-02-2017  
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Child, like many words, can defy concrete definition. All remain their mother's child, as long as they live, even years after mother perished.

That has some positive aspect; the child lives in a world of wonder, excitement, adventure, daring; none long for an end of those years. At every gathering of the Writers, we are asked to peek into each child that sits at table with us, regardless of their years.

The six year old forced to work for money anywhere, have their youth stolen, yet, seen elsewhere than work, they can act like the child they really are, when set beside a toy, pet, sibling.

My Sister Pat and I, would attend Catholic schools with children who had a life before, then during the Depression. That word, never in their vocabulary. She and I cannot speak for the others, but these years were, remain, a cherished era in our two long lives. My sister, 17 months younger, still lives not that many blocks from where father first gathered his family together once he received a job after four years of unemployment.

Those of us lucky enough, never have an end to childhood. It is an attitude. In every life. There are teaching moments the child may or may not notice.

Here are two, less thrilling, I noted, recall now,  
shared with family at those events.

Both involve the city of New Brighton, on the Beaver River 30 miles north of Pittsburgh. Today it is very likely New Brighton has a similar population, as it is penned in by that River on the west, a cliff on the east, and neighbor cities north and south. There was one Catholic Parish, St Joseph's with a four room, eight grade School. The nun's were young.

They shared our lives.

And so it happened, while in the second grade, one of my classmates dies. We were taken as a class to the evening funeral, sit together. As a final good-bye, do as instructed, process to the bier, individually look at her

face, say good-bye, press her hand. Children are born with a sense of time as endless. Such events bring to the surface, reinforce, mortality is part of inheritance.

Another teaching involved my parents, Pat and myself after visiting near-by Beaver Falls in a fall chilly evening. Then, preparing to cross the Beaver River to return home, Fire Engines attract my dad. He diverts. We follow, drive near a burning house, park, get out, inch forward into the silent crowd, until dad had the four of us together in a front row . The house is a skeleton of frames, totally engulfed in red and heat, that hurt our eyes, almost overwhelmed our exposed facial skin.

That would not be the etched memory. It was nearby. Not far from us huddled together was a Father, Mother, two children, and a few household possessions someone brought from their house. That sight of family, destroyed home and their possessions, haunts me to this day. Just as it did to all who came to watch fireman save a house, witnessed tragedy.

Growing old is not for sissies. We are here, because in youth we developed childish strengths needed to accommodate the vicissitudes of this distant tomorrow.

In childhood, we earned today,  
in those yesterdays.