

## Whatever Happened to Skinned Knees?

*By Liz Gibbons*

I don't see kids with skinned knees any more. When I was a kid I often had skinned knees or skinned elbows. So did my brother and all of our friends. Our Dad often took care of our wounds. He would gently clean it and then apply iodine or mercurochrome to the wound. Iodine stung like hell. Then he would fashion a thick gauze bandage to a size to cover the wound and secure it with white adhesive tape. Adhesive tape in those days lived up to its name. It resisted being removed. You could peel it off slowly which was a prolonged torture or bear the momentary pain and rip it off quickly. The tape left behind a residue of its adhesive ability. My Dad brought some toluene home from his lab. It is a great solvent and was a pain-free remover of the tape residue. Perhaps it wasn't the healthiest chemical to put on our skin, but we never had a reaction.

I grew up on what I thought was the best street in the whole world, the 200 block of Connolly Street in West Lafayette, Indiana. There were 40 children in our block, and many of us were within a six year age range. Our house was in the middle of the block. The street was often our playground. In the spring and summer we played soft ball in front of our house and in the fall we switched to touch football. We did not have Little League or soccer leagues. We made our own game rules. Summer evenings we often played Kick the Can, Hide and Seek, Tag, and other such games.

Happy Hollow, a woods two blocks away beckoned to be explored as well as a big hill, that we called Monkey's Peak. We could ride our bicycles all over town. There was a real sense of freedom and independent open-ended play.

Our neighbors were congenial. Parents instilled in their children good moral principles. We were taught to be considerate and responsible. They let us make our own mistakes and deal with the consequences. We learned how to deal with bullies and disappointments.

We did not have bicycle helmets, elbow pads, seat belts, car seats, or anti-bacterial soap. We drank water from the garden hose instead of running in the house to get a drink. My brother had a BB gun. It was natural to play outside unsupervised. We got cuts, bruises, scrapes, occasionally a broken bone, poison ivy, and sunburn. We did not slather on sun screen.

I sometimes question whether children today are protected too much? Are they too restricted in the activities they are allowed to do outside on their own? Are they encased in too many protective devices? Today with the awareness of sexual predators and other evils that can befall children, there may be more risk. But perhaps the risk has been blown out of proportion. We did have added protection, but it was from the mothers on our street who for the most part did not work outside of the home. They provided a network that looked out for us. I feel fortunate to have grown up on that wonderful street. Skinned knees were a small price to pay for the freedom we experienced that I believe children miss out on today.