

UPHILL

Emma Thornhill

It was the first day at school after the Easter recess. It was a bright, warm day. It meant mothers and fathers, or boyfriends, taking children to school sometimes pushing a pram or buggy in which another child is sitting, or that other child may be walking alongside its mother holding the side of the buggy or mother's hand.

There would be mothers two abreast on the pavement pushing buggies with their respective children in front or behind on the way to the primary school. Some mothers would be smoking and talking. Some mothers were on their own with their child and looking unkempt as if they had only just got out of bed. The fathers were better turned out and, as there were fewer on them, they were not engaged in gossip with another male guardian and were more attentive to the child in their care.

Other children were taken to school in the car and some only lived a very short distance away. This encouraged laziness.

Some mothers were horrible to their children shouting at them on the journey to school. A couple of children were smacked by irate mothers. A few children were crying and one was howling. Other children were happy, almost bouncing along swinging their school bags.

Almost all of the mothers wore jeans. After all, there was no point dressing up just to take the children to school.

When the children were safely inside the school premises, some mothers would congregate and stand around talking as cigarette smoke rose. Some of their conversations were unpleasant with the occasional four letter word and complaints and comparisons about their respective partners. They stood there for up to 45 minutes and on the return journey in the afternoon, they would say that they could not get all their work done because of the time taken in having to make two trips to school. These afternoon conversations were not so long since the children were anxious to get home but, nonetheless, some children were scolded for not keeping still.

Some mothers are inconsiderate and selfish and, on such occasions, you can understand the children's frustration which is dismissed as bad behaviour. Other mothers just took their children home efficiently. And so they should.

On this first day of the summer term most girls were in their summer dresses. The boys had the same boring school uniform. Boys had to remain plain while girls had a change of wardrobe. This therefore instils in girls early on the importance of clothes which results in their growing up to be fashion conscious.

For many who, after leaving their children at the school, had to return home, they had to walk uphill towards the High Street and the main residential area. It was long incline.

I used to be able to walk the length of this hill in about seven minutes but it now took almost twice as long. If you are a mother pushing a buggy, or with a small child walking beside you, it could take almost a quarter of an hour and it could be back breaking. When you reached the summit you had to catch your breath, stretch and then take deep breaths.

Pushing a buggy up this hill meant leaning forward all the time and having a bent back. I am glad I have never had to perform such a task.

On this first day after the Easter holidays, as we have said, it was very warm. One young mother was pushing a buggy up the hill and had a small child walking with her holding on to the buggy. She had dark hair and

was tall and the ascent was a struggle as she was leaning forward pushing the buggy and moving slowly to accommodate the difficult progress of the child. Foolishly, the young woman was wearing a very short dark blue, or navy blue, flared skirt over her bare legs and the combination of the hill and her leaning forward to push the buggy meant that it was touch and go whether her underwear would be seen. My, she was taking a risk.

It was a skirt that you could not sit down in, or wear when climbing steps or stairs or going uphill.

Two boys passed her going down the hill. They stopped and laughed and then turned around and knelt down ostensibly to up their shoes laces and looked up the skirt of the woman who had just passed them. The boys beamed with delight at what they saw.

The questions raised are:

Do women think about what they wear and the risks they take?

Do they care?

Is it that they like to be looked at sexually? Yet some women object to men regarding them as sexual objects?

Do we blame the boys for what they did, bearing in mind that if the young woman had not wore such a skirt they would not have been inquisitive?

When the mothers complain about having to take their children to and from school are they being fair to their children?

When mothers shout and swear at their children and in public, does this constitute abuse?

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