

## A Song of Love is a Sad Song....

In those days, the late nineteen fifties, the public school in Carp was a huge brick building on the hill opposite the fair grounds. The main building had four classrooms, all with big windows and painted an odd colour of green that was supposed to be easy on the eyes. We sat in rows in wooden desks with an inkwell at the top right and black metalwork sides that held the writing surface (and book box) and the seat together: Grade Four in room one; Grade Five in room two. Down the central stairs past a dusty moose head, Grade Six and the Grade Seven girls in room three and Grade seven boys and Grade Eight in room 4. The bannister was good for sliding, if you weren't caught. The front door was for the girls and the back door for the boys. An electric bell would call us in from recess or lunch, although by times the teachers, say at election time, would get so involved in their break conversation that recess would extend until lunch time.

In the yard we would play traditional games: British bull dog was one. Kids would line up at one side of the schoolyard and run across, while kids in the middle (I can't remember how we chose them) would try to tackle them. If you got to the pump house across the yard, you were home free, but, of course, would have to run back in the next wave, now with many more tacklers in the middle. I don't recall us playing any ball games -- perhaps we weren't allowed -- but throwing the apple core was always good fun. I threw an apple core at Brian McGee and he threw it back and broke a window behind me. I had to fix the window since I had provoked the exchange. Older kids might wander across the road to the fairgrounds where we would pry up the shutters on the old wooden buildings and go inside and smoke cigarettes that we had somehow pawed away from our parents. On reflection, it's amazing that any of those old pine buildings made it to the twenty-first century without being burned down. Did I mention that there were never any teachers in the yard to supervise our goings on.

My Grade Seven class was in room 4, on the North side of the building on the ground floor. The Grade Seven boys sat at the right in two rows and the whole Grade Eight class sat on the left in, perhaps, three rows. The classes were scarcely more structured than our outside play: we did readings (British history, I think), Sentence parsing (one line under the subject of the sentence and two under the verb), and math problems on the board, but we also played Crazy Eights at the back of the classroom during class. The prize in the math quizzes was to get to go buy cigarettes for the teacher down in Carp, an expedition that could be extended to take up quite a bit of time.

In Grade Eight there were also three gentlemen who sat at the front left, all of them already shaving, still in class because they hadn't got to sixteen yet, and someone had decided that they would never go to high school. After our morning exercises -- God Save the Queen and the Lord's Prayer -- they would, every morning, raise their hands, one after another, and ask to go to the Washroom. They would leave the classroom; go to the basement washroom, then out the door there to go down the hill to work in the General Motors garage across the road from the Golden Restaurant -- the bus stop. Shortly after 3 each day, they would retrace their route and come back to the classroom in time to be dismissed at the end of the school day. "Everything under control down there?" our teacher would ask. "Yessir! Oh yes!" they would all affirm.

But between the sometimes endless recesses and occasional fights in the school yard, I guess we did learn some things. I've forgotten the rules of Crazy Eights, but, for example, learned how to parse sentences: essential qualification for the English teacher I later became. And I also learned at least one song in the music class that we had, I think, once a week.

You will not be surprised to know that we did not have a music teacher resident in the school -- in fact my Mother used to drive me to Fitzroy Harbour, fifteen miles away, on Tuesday evenings so that I could continue my piano lessons. They had a music teacher there. We had a series of itinerant music teachers, all of whom seemed to be married to pastors around the country. One music teacher was married to the Anglican pastor in South March, another to a minister in Ottawa.

It is the music teacher from Ottawa I remember clearly from Grade Seven music. She was a large woman, but surprisingly light of foot and, as she spoke to us from the old upright piano in the classroom or got up to demonstrate singing, would float up and down rather as if she were inflated. Like a balloon. And she was anxious to give us an introduction to real music, unlike the CFRA we would hear on the station wagon school busses that brought us to and from school.

So, the song she taught us and which I remember, still fifty years later:

*A song of love is a sad song,  
Hi-Lili, Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo  
A song of love is a song of woe  
Don't ask me how I know  
A song of love is a sad song  
For I have loved and it's so  
I sit at the window and watch the rain,  
Hi-Lili, Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo  
Tomorrow I'll probably love again,  
Hi-Lili, Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo.*

Of course, it was all the more memorable because it was sung with great feeling, particularly by the Grade Seven Boys. And I can remember my friend, Maurice, scrunching his eyebrows together, rounding his mouth and looking deeply into my eyes before, from embarrassment, we both looked away.

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