

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I was talking to Bo-Bo, just last night, about some of the rubbish, which has been collected over the years and which is taking up my space in my home. I asked him as to the reason that many of these things have not been thrown away. There is some really old stuff that is stacked up in shoe boxes on the top shelf in one of my wardrobes. And so I asked him, very politely: 'Bo-Bo, for what reason are we keeping these silly things? Let's throw them out – if they can't be sold at auction or given away to a museum?' Bo-Bo, on realising that the 'things', about which I was referring, were all of his rubbish, many of the things, being used by him when he was studying engineering, more than 60 years ago, went positively red. 'They are all my treasures!' he yelled. 'Don't throw them out because, in years to come, people will want to buy them as a record of part of my life. They are living history! You will see! They are valuable artifacts.' Valuable artifacts? Such nonsense! Nobody wants that rubbish! And, anyway, who wants to remember a fat frog of a man, called Bo-Bo. I often cringe at the fact that the reality of Bo-Bo, today, is that the product, living in my house and sleeping in my bed, is very different from the sample of yesteryear when I married a well-proportioned, virile man with a view to having him father my children. The only thing that I noted with regard to these so-called 'treasures' of Bo-Bo was dust, gathering on top of the shoe boxes, piled ever higher as the years went by. I could use that space for my shoes or hats. Bo-Bo spouted similar diatribes when I wanted to clean out some of his old shirts, too, so, while he was on a trip to Beijing, I just cleaned out his closet without his knowledge. He, still, does not know what happened to his old shirts and jackets ... more of his so-called 'treasures'. In case you are wondering what are in those shoe boxes (the 'treasure troves, as Bo-Bo would have us believe), they contain old photographs of Bo-Bo, while in an English college, when he had some hair on his head, some old, smelly sports shoes, a riding crop, a set of foul-smelling pipes that he used to smoke, other nick-knacks, and, his pride and joy, a slide rule. I know that you have no idea what is a slide rule so I shall tell you. It is a calculating device: A manual calculating device, now largely obsolete, consisting of two rulers, marked with graduated logarithmic scales, one sliding inside the other. You could say that the slide rule was the forerunner of a hand-held calculator/computer. It is made of bamboo and I have no idea how it is used although Bo-Bo claims that he is able to manipulate it faster than an expert can use an abacus. Big deal! I don't want to pop his balloon, so I am leaving his 'treasures' in the shoe boxes ... for the time being, at least. Men! Crazy men and their little treasures and toys!

But this matter of Bo-Bo and his 'treasures' raise an interesting point when one compares people of yesteryear with people of today. Have you noted, My Dear Grandchild, what people carry around most of the time, today? In a full to overflowing knapsack, protruding from the backs of young ladies and young men, giving them the appearance of little Quasimodos, personified, right out of Victor Hugo's famous story, Notre-Dame de Paris (translated from the French into the English language as, The Hunchback of Notre Dame), one sees a bottle of water on one side, a towel, sticking out from under a flap (when carried by young men or boys), and all kinds of things, including, a comb, a mirror, a spare blouse (or shirt for the boys), a book, an MP3 player (in order not to miss that new song), a portable playstation (in order to hone one's skills at being a virtual train driver or racing-car driver), an umbrella (just in case, you understand), a full set of cosmetics (for the ladies – must, always, look one's best), facial tissues, a mobile telephone, and, of course, some little snacks (after all, one must not starve while walking down the road, must one?). On the outside of many of the knapsacks, one often sees mountain-climbing hooks and little soft toys, measuring about 3 inches in height. I wonder how many of those people, carrying these knapsacks, festooned with mountain-climbing hooks and what-have-you, have ever even walked up a steep hill let alone climb a mountain. What would happen if knapsacks had not been reintroduced to Hongkong, I have no idea. As I

walk along the streets of Hongkong, especially early in the mornings, I see people, rushing here and there, holding onto Styrofoam cups of coffee and, in a lapel of a blouse or jacket, there is a Bluetooth device, while, in their ears, there are wires protruding, linked to an electronic box, containing a device to play music. When I get into a lift, invariably, somebody is studying his/her iPod in order to make certain that, should somebody have sent an instant message, it could be read without delay. I wonder how Bo-Bo survived in his day without all of the above-mentioned things, being carried on his back when he went to school.

It is a really strange world in which we live and I wonder what the next generation will treasure. For myself, I only have a few folders of photographs of my younger days and some special things. I keep them in a dustproof, secret place.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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