

## Growing Up Too Soon

Glenn Colley

I was one of the blessed kids. I didn't know it, but I had the best kind of childhood; not completely problem-free (I constantly had to correct my sisters), but blessed. I had two parents who loved each other and loved me. My young mind never, ever considered that they might divorce. And they didn't. I was disciplined, mostly against my will, but consistently. There was a clear standard of right and wrong, and my father didn't put up with choosing wrong. I went to public elementary school in the late '60s and early '70s. I trick-or-treated with my sisters up and down our street, and mowed grass in the summer. Was I sheltered? Yes. The first time I saw a condom was in sixth grade. A boy named Luke brought one to class. I remember he used a crude term for it, and it sticks in my mind because I had no idea what it was. After all, I was only 12. Today many girls that age wear colorful sex bracelets to school. The jelly rainbow bracelets game is a courting ritual of sorts, which sends a coded message to boys that can be as serious as inviting sexual acts that most of us learned about much later.

Is growing up in innocence important? Is it valuable? Worth defending?

Of course. The worldliest people of our society evidence some sense of this when they use terms such as *adult content*, *adult language*, or *adult beverages*. Although these things are sinful for adults, too, even those who promote them make an attempt to protect children from them. Some things **should** be kept from impressionable children. I believe thinking people instinctively know the value of childhood innocence.

The innocence of childhood is valuable because it produces a gentle, secure atmosphere in which good morals and discipline are grown. A boy weighted with life's biggest problems and issues too early—before he's ready to deal with them maturely—will bear scars. He decides what he thinks about profound issues before his intellect is ready to evaluate and put a values system in place. His little mind hasn't developed the ability to put things in balance, to purge out the bad and retain the good. What goes through a child's mind when his parents constantly argue? How does he sort things out in his mind when they divorce? What forces are at work when he is often exposed to strong sexual messages and images, even before puberty? What is

happening to the soft, pliable character of a little boy when he is bathed in materialism and the overriding message that happiness is tied to things?

My generation produced the parents of this generation. The societal evolution of the '60s taught us that freedom of thought and action was more valuable than doing the "right" thing. This free-thinking philosophy robbed my generation of any absolute standard of morality. Today's children are being reared in the shadow of two generations of relativism. Today's society has collectively sacrificed its children's years of innocence on the altar of its hedonism and materialism. We attempt to salve our consciences by boasting about the ability of children to "bounce back" psychologically from the theft of innocence. As one father, who was about to divorce the mother of his eight-year-old son, said, "...you know, children are resilient." He had bought the devil's lie.

There are three major thieves of childhood innocence in our society.

First, divorce. Today I ate lunch with a man in his early thirties and the subject of his parents' divorce came up. He spoke of how he has difficulty trusting anyone or anything, and how that even as a sixteen-year-old he would defend his father saying he'd never done anything wrong, despite the fact that he had seen his father abuse his mother in various ways. The volume in my friend's voice increased as he reflected on his parents' continued reassurances that it wasn't his fault and that they really still loved each other, even though they were no longer going to live together. He called them liars and hypocrites. He was letting me see into his heart just a little. Grown man...married...productive, but deeply scarred. Every parent who has any thought of divorcing needs to read the book *Between Two Worlds, the Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* by Elizabeth Marquardt (Crown Publishers, New York, 2005). She has interviewed scores of adults, who, though productive in life, came from broken homes. Read it and you will never view this subject in the same way. Divorce is a dark thief of innocence.

Second, a media largely run by those who will sell anything if the money is right robs children of their innocence. Often arguing that media follows the evolution of society rather than influencing that evolution, media moguls are steadily moving us deeper into total hedonism and immorality. And don't kid yourself. It is largely about children. Fifteen-year-old "Hannah Montana" star Miley Cyrus is on the news pulling up her top to reveal her midriff while in the arms of a young male and pulling down her tank top to show off her underwear. Bratz™ dolls,

marketed to young girls, with make-up and scanty clothing, sell preschoolers an early and distorted view of what is beautiful. Google *Billboard* magazine online and read the lyrics of the top ten songs on the pop chart and what will pop is your eyes. The top song, as I write, is called "Lollipop," and it graphically describes sexual acts using gutter language. I heard last week of a four-year-old who counts it as her favorite song and knows all the lyrics. Because parents often have difficulty **understanding** the lyrics in the music and because many parents simply remain aloof to the music their children hear, as well as the movies and television they watch, Satan is piping messages into these young minds every day, robbing them of innocence. Parents, if you can't restrict that television to only innocent, harmless images, throw it out (Matthew 5:29,30). The same goes for the internet and the iPod.

The third major player in the robbing of childhood innocence is absent mothers. We have largely bought into the notion that we need to be at the same level of prosperity as our peers, and we have willingly forfeited our best time with our children in order to maintain this level. How many waking hours did you spend with your children in the last five days? The main reason I didn't know about hedonistic sex when I was a kid is that my mother was home anytime I was home. She was the front line of defense against any torpedoes the devil might have shot at her children. And she could do it too. Nothing got past her. Mothers, go home (Titus 2:3-5). We simply must go back to home-based childcare. One wise mother said, "God gave me duties to my husband and to my children. I would as soon give my wifely responsibilities to another woman as to give my mothering responsibilities to another woman."

"Over a very short period of time, there's been a dramatic truncation of childhood," says Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University in New Jersey. "Throughout history, this was always a time when children were free of the burdens and responsibilities of sexuality. Parents and society felt responsible to shelter children and provided close supervision and protective love." \*

But childhood is shrinking and the elimination of innocence is hurting us. Successful parents are the ones who act, not just react. There will be time enough for our children to witness the horrors of an immoral society. For now, let's fill their minds with the gentle, safe things that loving parents can provide while building fences to ensure them a happy place of childhood innocence.

\* “Innocence Lost ... Innocence Regained? - parents and community need to be intentional about preserving childhood” by Paula Gray Hunker, Insight on the News, Volume 15, July 19, 1999.