What Matters

A world past the screen – technology and our society

‘Darling, what does glutton mean?’
You hear your father cry,
‘Go and find a dictionary,’
Your mother would reply.

It means the time of laziness,
The dawn of a new era;
The end of real books and games,
Without doubt is coming nearer.

Of course, this sounds quite reasonable
But unbeknown to you,
The dictionary is an iPad app
And your thesaurus is one too.

On pen and paper as you write,
You use a decent grip
With electronic it’s just click or tap
And you lose your penmanship.

There are apps for clocks and mirrors,
And an electronic candle,
This concept is revolutionary
But more than I can handle.

Someone is sitting next to you,
On a bus that goes to town,
Sitting there with headphones in,
Not chatting, just looking down.

Torch, drawings, cameras,
Books and magazines,
This may sound like luxury
But what does it really mean?

Do you think this is welcoming?
Do you think it is nice?
Do you think it is sociable?
If so, then please think twice.

Once upon a time the world was different. Kids researched their homework using real books, some more than 100 years old. They played cricket with a willow bat, hitting a rubber ball into the paddock. They walked to the library, rode their bikes to the corner shop and bought lollies with money they’d earned. They chatted happily, telling riddles and jokes, laughing all the while.

Now we use Wikipedia and play cricket on a Wii, waving our hands in the air, attempting to hit imaginary balls. We use eBooks and race our friends on virtual bikes and compete for the highest score. We listen to music no-one else can hear and bury ourselves in tiny devices talking mindlessly to people who are only minutes away. Our vocabulary is being hauled away and replaced by abbreviations. We look down silently instead of making eye contact and smiling. This is not the world I would like to live in.

Digital technology is escalating in society. Around 85% of Australian homes have a computer. Over 75% of all Australians use the internet every day. Kids aged 8-10 spend up to 8 hours a day on the computer, teenagers even more. Kids spend just over an hour a day outside, less than half what their parents did.

There are certainly benefits to the innovations technology has brought us, but it is important to keep in touch with the physical world and not let the virtual one take over. If we live only through our screens, we lose the ability to feel, see, touch and hear and we stop caring for our environment, real birds and animals, real people.

Use playgrounds instead of computer games.
Visit your friends instead of texting them.
Draw real pictures instead of tapping on a screen.

Why do we spend so much time living through our computers when the outside world awaits us to play in the breeze and sunshine? You might argue there’s no-one to play with, nothing to do.

But there is. Use your imagination…
What matters to me is the world I live in. I want people to be friendly, creative and healthy. I am afraid a new generation of children may be coming, a generation who will never run around on the grass, climb trees, discover magic in a dusty book, or scrape their knees falling off their bikes.

Technology can be brilliant
And that is plain to see
But it can destroy imagination,
What will the future be?

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