

Street Games

Skipping with a piece of coconut rope was a favourite game for the girls, although the constant twirling of the rope and its constant beating on stone caused it to break numerous times, it was re knotted and the game continued. Two girls could skip together, one jumping into the twirling rope after the other had made room for her to jump in. We would chant songs while skipping: 'Cobbler, cobbler, mend my shoes, get them done by half past two...'and 'Eber Kenezer king of the Jews bought his wife a pair of shoes. When the shoes began to wear Eber Kenezer began to swear.'

There was very little traffic, so we performed 'The Farmer's In His Den' in the middle of the road in a circle, hold-ing hands. We sang, 'The farmer wants a wife.' and the chosen farmer in the centre, selected a wife to join him and so on. The chase game called Touch or Tag, wore us out by bedtime.

You might be lucky enough to have a wooden spinning top and wooden whip with string threaded through. We would search for old sweet wrappers and stick small coloured pieces on top, moving the coloured paper, changing the position, fascinated by the spinning circles. They looked so pretty and almost hypnotised us as they spun. 'Come and see mine,' I would call to my sisters and friends.

Hopscotch was a great game we loved. We scratched six numbers with a small stone onto the square pavement slabs. On one foot we skipped another small stone around. There was a circle version of this game. Our shoes were scuffed playing this game to my mother's dismay she always polished our shoes every evening. The boys huddled in small groups on the pave-ment playing with glass marbles.

Sometimes someone would be lucky enough to find a discarded bike wheel. A father or older brother would remove the spokes from the wheel, and with a piece of metal bent into a hook shape, the lucky boy would race around controlling and guiding the wheel with the hook. The boys called them Bowlies. No one minded running an errand if you had a Bowlie to run with. Another great thing for the boys was when an old pram was being thrown out. The four wheels would be made into what they called a gambo. The wheels were transformed into a gambo by fixing a piece of wood across it to sit on, then a piece of rope tied each side of the front to steer it, no brake other than an extended foot held sharply down. Fathers would often tack some hobnails or segs as they were sometimes called into the bottom of shoes to make them last longer. Two maybe three children would ride on the crudely made fabulous gambo as it careered down the slopes at the side of the streets.

Near the railway station, a small piece of railway line, that belonged to the colliery had been left. On this small piece of railway line, were the skeletal remains of an old coal dram. It could be pushed and moved only a short distance, as earth and weeds had swallowed the small piece of track that it stood on. The wheels were so heavy and thick it took three or four of us to move it. One day a small group of us were struggling to push the dram, Joyce's leg was on the track, we stopped as Joyce toppled to the side. The sharp edge of the wheel had knocked her shin. Joyce fell to the side. We all gathered around her, there was a nasty cut and blood ran down her leg soaking into her white ankle sock.' Go get our dad

quickly' I shouted to my sister Ray. Our father came running down the grassy bank with an anxious look on his face. He carried Joyce up to our house, it was directly in front of the Railway Station. My father put Joyce down on the settee, while my worried mother fussed putting cushions behind her. We all crowded in to watch the drama, my mother ushered us all outside, while the Doctor was sent for. Joyce needed a few stitches in her wound, my mother ran to the out-side toilet at the back of our garden and shut herself in until the procedure was over. For days she was cosseted and allowed to sit in my fathers' rocking chair with cushions and a blanket. Many hours were spent below the grass bank that the terraced street was built on. Each of us would gather stones and form a square with them to play 'house'. There were tips on the grassy bank opposite the houses where people threw their coal ashes and other refuse. Some years later the council would send a lorry around to collect the ashes that were left in old zinc buckets at the kerb. On the tips we would find old jam jars that we'd wash in the small stream nearby and fill with wild flowers. They were placed on a large stone that was our pretend table. Old shoe polish tins found on the tip were filled with a mixture of dirt with water and buttercups and daisy heads were pressed gently on top to complete our mud pies. Playing mud pies gave hours of joy. Of course you had the task of fashioning an oven out of old bricks and stones, to bake them in.

We washed our muddy hands in the cold water of the stream. 'Oh it's freezing,' I shouted to the others. 'Look at the mud splashes on your dress.'

'You will have a row off our Mam,' my sisters warned. Glorious cloudless days, of contentment and fun when the world had barely touched us.

By Ethel Oates