



Letter to My Younger Self

Babs Horton

DEAR BABS,

We all make mistakes but try and remember that your exclusion from the Cheery Cherubs nursery school was not entirely your fault. To be fair, the curriculum for the girl child back in 1956 was rather limited and completely uninspiring. If the Principal, Miss Dill had taken her head out of the *Daily Sketch* and the *Woman's Weekly* for five minutes and read Simone de Beauvoir, life might have been more fun. Sadly, Germaine Greer was still locked up in a convent school in Melbourne, so we languished in ignorance.

Good girls were meant to play happily with limp rag dolls and dented saucepans in the Home Corner. They were supposed to content themselves with ironing dolls' clothes and to endure the indignity of being forced to become the unwilling wife of a snotty faced farmer in his den.

They were not meant to take the wheels off the dolls pram or give Tiny Tears an appendectomy. It was bound to end badly for you. You were already on your second warning so when you forcefully removed a boy called Gareth from the blue pedal car, he had been hogging all morning, things escalated quickly. This errant behaviour of yours was not deemed a ladylike thing to do by Miss Dill who had not yet heard of feminism or gender studies. Your trial by shaking and finger wagging was a very one-sided affair and you were not once asked for your side of the story or given any legal advice.



You should be grateful to the nursery nurse with a forensic bent who matched up the prints of your baby teeth to those on the aforementioned hysterical boy's badly bruised behind. Do not feel guilty. He will become an investment banker and although it will be a little embarrassing when you are a bridesmaid in 1978 and he is best man at the wedding of mutual friends, just remember that he can afford to pay for therapy; as a writer, you can't.

Eventually, you'll forgive the person who thought it would be character building to bang you up in a convent school run mainly by dysfunctional nuns. Here you will be forced to take elocution lessons to rid you of your rather peculiar accent — a mixture of South Wales, the Home Counties and Willesden.

Your education will be substandard but on the positive side you will learn how to abseil from a third-floor window under cover of darkness, survive on gristle and gruel, and camouflage yourself in the vegetable garden with a bottle of scrumpy, evading capture; you'd have given the SAS a run for their money.

When you publish your first novel, which you will, despite the English teacher's sarcastic and slightly defamatory comments on your end-of-year report, a woman will write to you and say that she went to the same convent school as you and can't believe anyone who was educated there made a success of their life.