

REMEMBER THE HUG?

The Hug: a bodily embrace, two arms wrapped around another person, one arm casually draped over a shoulder; or the awkward clasp between two people who are supposed to like each other, but don't.

The hug, it came in all forms. The lover's long caress, the cousin's bear hug or the playful squeeze between longtime friends, all hugs. It was a father's last act before giving 'away' his daughter to another man. The ultimate hug, a mother's gentle holding, rocking back and forth, as she soothes away the tears and the hurt of the day.

At a funeral standing in grief with a family, those sad moments when a hug was the only comfort one could give or receive.

There was a time when we didn't think much about a hug. For most of us it was a basic greeting, a daily occurrence, sometimes even an expectation. We labeled ourselves frankly pointing out our preferences: we bragged about being a hugger and barged in with outstretched arms or insisted, almost violently, that we were not. We described another person as being a good hugger or a person to avoid and we disengaged as quickly as possible if captured. Some of us nostalgically recalled a grandmother's greeting hug, filled with promises of good food and elaborate attention.

There was a time, we didn't think much about an elbow either. Noticing it was relegated to those times when we yelped in agony from hitting our 'funny bone.' Today bumping elbows has replaced the hug and there is something definitely not funny in that.

I have a friend who talks about receiving only two hugs, given six months apart, over the entire last year. Her voice was so filled with sadness and longing that I automatically reached out -to hug her - but had to stop myself.

I watch TV series in awe seeing people so casually touch each other. I'm surprised that I have that same uncomfortable feeling when I watch old 40's movies and a cigarette was part of every scene. I questioned how could people have been so naïve back then? Didn't they know the dangers of smoking?

Then, a thought creeps through my mind as I realize that those modern day series were filmed just over a year ago. Didn't we know the dangers?

For the longest time in my life, I was one of those non-huggers. Stiff in my professional and sensible approach to the world, I was quick to step away if I suspected a hug was imminent. A handshake or acknowledging smile was enough of a greeting for me.

Then something happened in my fifties. I fell in love and discovered the profound healing from being held. I came to appreciate a healthy hug. Happy with life, I soon found so many reasons to hug others and to be hugged. With each new embrace, I felt more at ease and before long I too had succumbed and became a bona fide hugger. Until now.

How odd that there was a time when today's restrictions on hugging would have been a non-issue for me but not anymore. Immensely grateful that I have someone in my 'bubble' to hug yet I so miss all the others, the bear hugs, the casual embraces and yes, even the awkward ones.

The hug, a part of our history, is it forever lost to our future?

Hopefully, not.

I remember the hug.

Dorothy Gibbons 2020