

ITCH

I imagine it's the rare parent nowadays whose child has not had nits.

When I was at primary school there was a real stigma attached to having head lice. There were regular visits from a nurse, nicknamed Nitty Norah, who would examine our hair. Any child found having nits was sent home.

Today we are told that, "nits like clean hair" and that it has nothing to do with one's personal hygiene.

Alas, the nit nurse has gone the way of so many other things. Parents today are not only expected to check their children's hair on a regular basis but also to inform the school if they find head lice.

Unlike fleas, head lice can't jump. They walk from one head to another so you would normally need to be fairly close to someone in order to get them. It's my belief that little girls are more likely to get them than boys because girls tend to huddle closer.

When our daughter was about five she came home from school with a note saying that some of the children in her class had head lice and that her hair should be checked.

I used to find it hard enough checking our cat for fleas. But nits? Yuk!

Lo and behold I found a few eggs (nits) in my daughter's hair. I bought the recommended lotion from the chemist and treated her head with the foul smelling stuff. One was advised to treat all the family - just in case - so I also used the lotion on my own hair and that of her two older brothers.

But what about my husband? Shouldn't the small amount of hair he had left on his head also be treated? Alas, he was away on a conference at the Vatican where he was going to be meeting Pope John Paul 11nd.

You can imagine what I was thinking.

My husband enjoyed his private audience with the Pope. They shook hands and chatted for some time.

The Pope asked where we lived. It turned out that he had heard of Watford. He knew all about the football team and Elton John! He was, my husband said afterwards, very friendly and surprisingly normal.

My husband was blessed as was all his family including me.

Afterwards, if you wished, you could purchase photos or even a video of your audience with the pontiff. In the photo we have, that was taken at the time, one can see that they were standing pretty close to one another.

A few days later I happened to see the Pope on a BBC TV news broadcast. What's more, to my absolute horror, he was scratching his head!