**How is life different today compared to when you were a child?**

The biggest changes in life today compared to 60 years ago are technological. For example, when I was a child, we had a two-party telephone line. That means that we shared a telephone line with another family. So if you wanted to make a call you had to pick up the phone (attached to the wall) and see if someone else was already talking. If so, you hung up and tried again later. There was a sense of relief if you picked up the phone and got a dial tone. That meant you could place a call. This system kept phone calls short because if you made the other party wait a long time, eventually they would run out of patience and break in and ask you to finish your call because they had been waiting.
If you wanted to place a long distance call, you had to dial “0” for the Operator and have her place the call for you. (I say “her” because telephone operators were exclusively female.)
Most families had one telephone in the house, and it usually was in the kitchen. So there was no hope of privacy. Everyone in the house could hear your conversation (and so could the other party on your party line if they didn’t hang up after finding the line occupied). Everyone had just one phone because the phone company would charge you for every extension phone. When I got to be a teenager, I ran a wire from the main telephone to an extension phone I bought for my bedroom. By this time, we no longer had a party line, but anyone could pick up the phone in the kitchen and listen in to a conversation on the extension phone.
But the greatest change in telephones would not come until I was an adult. That was the invention of mobile telephones. They were a game changer. In the past, if you were going to pick someone up somewhere you had no way to communicate with them the minute you left the house. Mobile phones meant you were always in touch and people could find each other easily. Of course, there was a downside to always being reachable. Before mobile phones, when you left your home or office, your time was your own. There was a certain relief to not having to worry about answering a phone (or a text). Once mobile phones became common, employers and others expected you to be reachable at all hours of the day and night, no matter where you were.
And I think that is the most significant difference between life 60 years ago and now. There used to be more relaxation time, time for yourself. It used to be okay to sit outside in a park and read a book without the possibility of being interrupted by calls or texts, and without the distraction of social media. It used to be easy and okay to be “off the grid.” All it took was a walk outside.
Another major technological change that profoundly affected life was the invention of the video recorder. When I was a kid, television shows were on at a certain time and if you weren’t in front of your television at the exact time the show was scheduled, you missed the show. This is why networks ran summer reruns. They gave you a chance to see the shows you missed during the regular season and could not otherwise see.
The video recorder changed everything. It freed us to watch television shows on our own schedule. Where in the past if you wanted to watch two shows that were on at the same time you had to pick one and miss the other, now you could record one and watch it later. Being freed from the chains of network schedules allowed us not to have to plan our lives around television shows. On the other hand, when we all had to watch shows at the same time, it created a community experience that would be discussed by everyone the next day. This was the case when the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan. Everyone I knew tuned in that night and the next day everyone was talking about the Beatles.
The last major technological change that affected everyday life was the internet. When I was a kid, if you had a question you wanted answered, you either searched the books you had at home (such as an encyclopedia or an almanac) or you went to the library. Today, I just ask Google. Years ago if you were sitting around a park with friends and a question came up, if everyone was stumped there was no way to quickly get an answer. There would often be phone calls the next day that began “I looked up the answer to what we were talking about yesterday.”
And this is another difference between life 60 years ago and today. Because of the lack of all this technology, life was slower. As kids, we didn’t have video games or phones to keep us inside. If we wanted to communicate with our friends, we had to go outside and meet them. For this reason, play was almost exclusively outside. For me, it was a lot of playing ball. It could be morning sandlot baseball games, afternoon step ball games or evening stickball or Wiffle Ball games. In between all this we would have hit-the-stick ball games (a game as primitive as it sounds). We would go home just to eat something.
We would rush through dinner (often with friends waiting outside) and probably not go back home again until it got too dark to see a ball. Our parents knew we were in the neighborhood, and they could rely on neighbors to keep an eye on us. For the most part, mothers were home and fathers were at work all day. Practically no one worked from home. Most families had just one car and they washed it themselves. We all learned lessons of courtesy and community both at home and at school. Because of the GI Bill, most fathers could afford to buy homes. Homelessness was unknown. The country was split by the Civil Rights movement and later by the Vietnam War. But each side respected the opinions of the other (even if they strongly disagreed with them). It was an age of moderate political views. Democrats and Republicans were not far apart on the political spectrum. Extremist views existed, but they were shunned and given only minimal attention by the media.
Like most periods in history, my childhood was the best of times in some ways, and the worst of times in others. Life was simpler because everyone seemed to be on the same page. Democracy was good and Communism was bad. Technology and the resulting mainstreaming of extremist views changed the country. It shifted the societal emphasis from working for the communal good to emphasis on individual rights. What once was “common” courtesy became uncommon.
On the other hand, we have made major advances in environmental awareness and public policy. When I was a child, the only recycling was of glass soda bottles. Everyone drove gas guzzling cars (enabled by gasoline prices under a dollar). Smoking was allowed everywhere and being in a smoke-filled room was very common.
As the years go by, clothes may change along with hairdos and people may look different, and drive different-looking cars. But human attributes like love and caring for others on the one hand, and selfishness and greed on the other will always be with us. And so will our love of new technology.
    But Technology is always a double-edged sword. There is no stopping innovation and its resulting good and evil effects. All we can do is try to enjoy the good effects and guard against the bad.



    Choosing teams was always the first order of business in any pickup baseball game.