

Today's World Book

Today has turned out to be another cold, rainy day. It is a great day to plop down in a chair, fire up the computer, and wander around the Internet. As I checked out various news and sports articles and looked at some of the silliness on Facebook, I couldn't help but think back a bit...

When I was a kid -- a few years ago -- there was no Internet. There weren't even many computers, and the computers that did exist certainly weren't of the "personal" variety. Back then, it would take a computer the size of an entire room to match the firepower of one of our modern hand-calculators! Now I carry around a "super computer" in my pocket -- a smart phone -- that has easily more computing power than any of NASA's Apollo spaceships! And not only does my pocket super-computer have impressive processing power, it can instantaneously communicate with other computers all around the world and bring information to me on practically any subject!

As a kid, my "internet" was a set of World Book Encyclopedias. I spent many hours in these books poring over the articles on dinosaurs, wars, airplanes, animals, battleships, dogs, cats, states, presidents, countries, and any number of other subjects that happened to interest me on a particular day.

Our set of World Book encyclopedias contained 20-25 books -- arranged alphabetically... and in addition to the alphabetical volumes there was a set of dictionaries (two thick books) and a large atlas containing all kinds of maps. I loved to look at the maps and look at the various states, countries, rivers, and oceans. Also, each year a "Yearbook" would be released with articles related to the prior year.

These books helped me and my siblings with school projects, reports, and presentations. They also provided countless hours of entertainment as I just flipped through one of the books seeing what I might come across. The time I spent wandering around in these books was not only entertaining -- it was educational. I probably didn't realize it, but I was educating myself and expanding my mind as I flipped the pages of these books!

The Internet is in some ways like a set of encyclopedias -- in other ways it is not. While a kid can wander around on the Internet and find plenty of educational material, he can also wander into more harmful things. An encyclopedia might be compared to a school -- with its various subjects arranged somewhat logically. The Internet might be compared to a marketplace -- with its various offerings of good, bad, healthy, dangerous, wonderful, and even deadly things all mixed together! This marketplace is truly an amazing collection of "stuff." It has wonderful articles and videos on practically any subject -- right alongside the raunchiest pornography imaginable! It is truly a powerful mixture of all that is good and all that is bad. (Better watch your kids -- and watch where your fingers click as well!)

Times have certainly changed. As wonderful as our set of encyclopedias was in my growing-up years, I do not even own a set of them today! These books -- for most of us -- went the way of the Dodo bird.

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Now "google" is a noun (and verb) we all understand -- and vast knowledge is at our fingertips. I like the power and convenience of modern technology. But I have to admit, there is something about the innocence of those days -- curling up on the couch on a rainy day -- learning about Australian Aborigines or Texas mountain ranges or tributaries of the Amazon River... turning the pages... the texture and smell of the books in my hand...

Well, I will now click a button, and I will post these paragraphs of ramblings about yesteryear onto the Internet. Now there's something you couldn't do with a World Book encyclopedia!

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