

Kid-Calls: Pre-World War I

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We cherish the jumping rope and counting rhymes of our childhood. We re-tell the "when I was young" stories and incidents. We sing the songs of our youth to our grandchildren. However, I have never read about or heard anyone tell about the things we Lancaster City kids said, or screamed, when we were in the thin of a word battle or challenging a playmate to one.

These words seemed to have an important place in the Edwardian child's world of give and take. Even "nice" children, (of which I hope you'll believe I was one), were known to use them on occasion. The following incidents are from real life. The names, except for my brother's and mine, are fictitious to protect the guilty.

There was the time I beat Lydia Engle at hopscotch. She was a poor sport if there ever was one. She took off for home calling after me," Miriam bom Biriam from the ego go firium. Two-legged tie-legged, bow-legged Miriam".

I was on our front porch the next time she passed our house on the way to Pappy Bower's store with her molasses kettle. I watched for this opportunity and yelled with authority, "Lydia bom Bydia from the ega go fydia. T-legged, tie-legged, bow-legged Lydia".

Sally Buckwalter was unlucky with her first name. Let her make the smallest mistake such as dropping her end of a jumping rope and the kids pounced on her with a favorite sing-song call, "Sara Jane! Sara Jane! She's my cross-eyed consumptive Sara Jane! And all her teeth are false from eating epsom salts. She's my cross-eyed consumptive Sara Jane!"

When music supervisor, Miss Margaret Humphreville, assigned me the role of "Tiger Lilly", (one of the ugly sisters) in the combined elementary schools' musical play, "The Flower Cinderella", I knew what to expect. The recess gang would do its best to prevent me from "thinking I was something". The name they called me as they picked their little quarrel was "Freckleface". It was known that I'd gotten up before sunrise on May first and washed my face in the dew as advised by the almanac.

However, I retaliated by spieling off at the top of my enlarged tonsils: "Polly noses! Carrot tops! Fatty, fatty boom-a latties! Smarty pants! Bowlegs, you can't stop a pig in an alley!"

My brother, Dick, had a technique for getting out of physical combat with the other boys. Good thing too, for he was a no-muscle, string bean. If Johnny Shaeffer claimed the marbles and Dick

wouldn't agree and Johnny looked as though he were about to sock Dick, then my brother went into his act. He'd deepen his voice and, out of the side of his mouth grate, "Wanna fight? Join the army! Wanna nickle? Suck a pickle!". Sometimes this was followed by, "Every time I spit I break a brick". Dick spit and Johnny drew in his horns.

Sometimes, not often, words failed us. It was then the "nobody home" bit came in handily. A gentle tap, about heartbeat speed, with forefinger on the temple plus a sad, hopeless shake of the head—this was the gambit.

Early one spring evening Daisy Good was flattered to be invited to share a lemon phosphate at Fitzpatrick's "druggy" with two older, uppergrade playmates. Walking home they noticed, trudging ahead, the not very popular teacher of the older girls. The latter dared Daisy to call after her, "Roses are red, violets are blue. Vinegar's sour and so are you!".

Daisy did. No response. The girls huddled, whispered, giggled and came up with another which Daisy called much louder, "Old maid! Lemonade! Made in the shade by an old maid." A slight turn of the head of the victim sent the callers scurrying, deliciously frightened. However, twilight failed to conceal their identity as Daisy found out next morning in the Principal's office. She didn't have off for recess for a month.

We all loved a cry-baby, especially Essie Resh. Her ready tears gave us a chance to use, "Cry baby cry! Stick your finger in your eye! Tell your mammy it wasn't I "in later years, "Oh joy! Mamma's got a little baby boy! Wrap him up in tissue paper. Put him in the refrigerator" was a favorite with my younger sisters.

When Lizzie Light moved to our block she added to the cry-baby repertoire, "Oh, go home and tell your mom she wants ya!" as well as "Mother, mother pin a rose on me! Father, father turn the hose on me!". Lizzie was one of the Lebanon County Lights, very Dutchified. When puzzled or exasperated she said, "Vat da Diehinker!" voice ascending on the "hinker".

Jennie Eshleman's specialty was "You're crazy as a bed bug!". That is after her family went early one season to Miller's Cottage in Atlantic City. The Millers were just opening their boarding house but Jennie's pop persuaded them to stop brooming down cobwebs and make up beds for the Eshlemans.

Afterwards Jennie boasted of a horrible night of peculiar smells, much swattings and scratchings. She proudly showed off many of her thirty-seven red welts. She earned "Crazy as a bed bug!".

However, Jennie wasn't the only kid in the W. Walnut St. neighborhood who specialized. Sue Stauffer was a lover of flora and fauna. She went in for such calls as "Copy cat!" "Monkey see, monkey do!" "Penny dog!", "None of your beeswax!", "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me!", and "I don't chew my cabbage twice!".



This rural school in eastern Lancaster County is attended largely by children of ultra-conservative Plain Sect families. None are Amish, however. The faces of the children reveal a love of fun; probably they have their own "kid calls" as do their more sophisticated city cousins.

I was very jealous of an out-of-town cousin about my age who had curly hair; not straight; brown hair, not red; dimples, not freckles. Lucy was held up to me as being well-mannered, obedient and "Why can't you be more like her?" I determined to get revenge by picking a quarrel and giving her a "piece of my mind." I took her best ball one day, spilled rootbeer on her new dotted Swiss and cheated at jacks repeatedly. She reached the breaking point, shook those brown curls, smiled until her dimples froze and sweetly drawled, "Mimi, I love you like a pig loves slop!" In a daze I left her sitting on grandmother's step, opened the backyard gate and ran home to our block where I could pick a fight with a worthy opponent.

There is no recollection which of the kids calls were my favorites but as I think of them now, for some obscure reason, I like best these two: "Oh, you're full of balloon juice", and "Do you see me? Do you know me? Do you want a piece of bologna?"