

# Education and Food Back in the Old Days

**By Samuel L. Blumenfeld**

I was born in 1926, which makes me probably older than anyone reading this magazine. Which means that I have a sense of history, that is, an understanding of cause and effect, that most young people lack these days. Is it important? As Sarah Palin would say, "You betcha." In other words, I know history intimately because I have lived through it: the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the current wars. That's a lot of history to know first hand.

Although I was born less than ten years after World War One, that war seemed as remote to me as if it had never taken place. That's the way the memory works, and that's why I can understand why so many people today cannot know what it was like to live through World War II or the Korean War, or even the Vietnam War. And I have no idea how the schools teach these wars these days.

I was born on Manhattan Island in the world's greatest metropolis, the most expensive and legendary piece of real estate on the planet. I was born in one of those tenements in East Harlem which was filled with new immigrant families and their new American children.

At age five I was sent to kindergarten at the neighborhood elementary school, P.S. Number something or other. Of course, I walked to school. A very nice policeman at the corner helped us cross the avenue. In those days kindergarten was play time. Formal education started in the first grade. I remember the name of my first-grade teacher, Miss Sullivan. Or was it Miss Murray? She taught us to read with phonics and to write in cursive. So our little brains were totally activated to become lovers of books and writing. There was no such thing as dyslexia in those days, and certainly no such thing as Ritalin.

The classrooms were pretty clean and bare back then. Just a portrait of George Washington hanging on the wall, and a cursive writing chart over the blackboard. We sat in desks bolted to the floor. Today, kids sit around tables facing one another, coughing into each others faces, pestering one another. Back then you faced the back of a fellow pupil's head and you did not chat. You were quiet and attentive. The teacher was the focus of attention. She wasn't a facilitator. She had your attention, so you couldn't possibly get attention deficit disorder.

Back in those days we went home for lunch. My mother usually prepared a fried egg sandwich and a glass of milk. Then I walked back to school. On Sundays my mother would make a herring and onion sandwich on a roll which I loved. She would buy a salted herring out of a barrel at the appetizer or fish store and that would be our Sunday breakfast and lunch. They were delicious. That was Eastern European fare.

Your taste in food is developed very early in life by what your parents feed you. So I've always liked fried egg sandwiches. Today, schools serve breakfast and lunch, so parents have less of an influence on what a child gets to eat. Once, during a school outing, we were served tuna-fish sandwiches and tomato soup. I had never had that at home, and I liked them. My sister, two years older than I, had friends who introduced her to foods my mother was unfamiliar with, such as mayonnaise. Once we discovered mayonnaise, it became a household favorite. My sister also introduced me to chow mein in the local Chinese restaurant. I've loved Chinese food ever since.

For some reason tomatoes tasted better in those days. That's probably because the taste hadn't been altered by so much special scientific breeding. But you can't stop progress. And so the advent of the supermarket with its myriad of packaged and frozen foods and the rise of so many fast-food franchises has made it easier for Americans to feed themselves with as little fuss and time as possible.

As for education, progress in the public schools has seemed to go in the opposite direction. Despite all of the computers and new textbooks, reading skills have declined. According to *Reading at Risk*, a report issued by the National Endowment of the Arts in 2007, American literacy is in serious decline. Dana Gioia, chairman of the Endowment stated: "This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading."

In short, instead of getting smarter, our kids are getting dumber. High tech executives complain that young Americans lack the basic skills that are needed in today's high tech industries.

And that is why home-schooling is where you find real progress in education: high literacy, enhanced academic skills, interest in technology, government, history, geography, and most important of all, Biblical religion.

If you want to see what educational progress looks like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just attend one of the many home-school conventions that now take place every spring across America. You'll see parent-educators in droves listening to lectures, examining books and curricula, making sure that what they do at home will enable their kids to become the best educated young adults in America.