

# The Lost Child

Elaine Kennedy

Do you know how many hours a person with a lifespan of eighty years spends alive on this earth? Have a guess! A million? Five million? Actually its about Six hundred thousand. Doesn't sound much does it?!

If we were able from birth to chart every hour and how it should be filled, I wonder how many would be more fulfilling, how many would be less wasted, by ditching all kinds of manipulations imposed on us by previous generations? Would our fertile minds be freer to explore new horizons instead of spending hours sifting through the boggy silt of inherited drudgery?. What would matter and what wouldn't matter? How wonderful it would have been as a child to have time to assimilate the wonders of nature, and of being a live part of it, before being made aware of the adults' world of fears, inadequacies and prejudice. Long forgotten is the realisation that childhood innocence is not just a space full of ignorance, but a buffer given by mother nature, in her wisdom, to be released very slowly over the years in order to allow the young mind to develop and assimilate knowledge at a pace it can cope with.

However, in our modern world of global and instant communications, urban overcrowded living etc., it has become impossible to shield our young from the destructive premature loss of that buffer of innocence - the globalisation of communications seems to be increasing the problems, not reducing them. The Dalai Lama says "Modern Industrial Society often strikes me as being like a huge self-propelled machine. Instead of human beings in charge, each individual is a tiny insignificant component with no choice but to make a move when the machine moves".

To millions of us, a huge element of that machine which tries to make us move is prejudice. Prejudice is a hugely destructive force which starts from tiny seeds sown into that fertile young mind from the day of its birth, pushing the buffer of innocence wide enough in order to condition our offspring and to engender in them all our pettynesses and inherited fears - and so every generation ensures that the next doesn't stand a chance!

In days of old, before mass movement of people around the globe, prejudice about each other was contained. However in this age of multicultural societies, of families finding them selves split by vast distances and ways of living their lives, of the passing of old family and community structures, of people with no idea of their origins due to sperm bank donations etc., we face a new target for possible prejudice, one against people who have no sense of identity, who are genetically homeless, people who have no rootedness, people who have evolved in totally different ways from their blood relations, and don't feel totally at home where they have been born and bred.

Seeing the play 'Midnight Children' by Salman Rushdie, which involves the children born at the exact moment India was separated from Pakistan, I felt an affinity with the people who are divided individuals and go through life needing to reinvent themselves in order to achieve a sense of rootedness. The play takes a dramatic license by making each midnight person believe they had special magic powers. In real life this would translate into the need to prove constantly that one has something of value which makes one worthy of being included - and we do so want to be included. Of course the special gifts of multicultural lingual ability, true insight into more than one culture and dual genetic make up are invaluable tools for the road of life. However, one is also doubly aware of the ignorance that is our inherited prejudice, the destructive forces of seeing with a jaundiced eye and the hopelessness of early conditioning and bigotry infused into the powerless child. If one poisons his landscape, he will either grow into that scene and perpetuate it in his offspring or he will rebel and see it for what it truly is, a destructive and arid force which he will have to waste many a precious hour of his life trying to wriggle free from. Eventually, resentful of the time he has been made to waste shedding powerful early indoctrinations, he will emerge a restructured adult. He will never feel truly rooted, but however many of his six hundred thousand hours are left to him, he will have a sense of divided wholeness, especially if he believes in the words of St Paul: "There is a variety of gifts but always the same spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them". Divided wholeness - it is the most some of us will ever achieve - but overcoming prejudice is achievable by every sentient being on this planet.

