

SEX EDUCATION

Eastgate is educated – well almost.

FOR reasons which seemed quite obscure if not unnecessary at the time, our early curriculum included a module on sex education.

Since we were enduring a sixteen week incarceration within the College's confines, with no immediate prospect of a foray into the sinful temptations of greater Canberra, it seemed an unnecessary waste of our time, not to mention that of the staff.

Although we were at that stage unaware of the delights to come of The Tennis Party, it was perhaps the potential dangers of this bacchanal which prompted the College authorities to include a cautionary moment into our otherwise carefree existence.

Perhaps 'sex education' is a misnomer.

In an environment in which every function we were expected to perform had been painstakingly analysed, sorted into its constituent parts, taught to us and rehearsed *ad nauseum*, it was assumed, it seemed, that we already understood the basic functions and consequences of Boy A and Girl B engaging in an exchange of bodily fluids through a mutual coupling of what the PTI's termed our "wedding tackle."

We were instead to be cautioned in no uncertain terms about the potential consequences of such casual sexual liaisons upon ourselves, and upon our military careers.

We were admonished by the terms of our enlistment not to marry, so that the incautious spilling of seed and a consequent unwanted pregnancy would have, by the generally accepted mores of those times, seen a potential parent heading off to finish his training at Portsea in the company of a hastily acquired bride.

The alternatives offered little comfort.

Those who had been brought up in the Catholic faith carried the additional burden of an intimate understanding of the eternal penalties of the pursuit of solitary pleasures.

Those who had not, labouring under the belief that excessive self abuse could lead to blindness and worse, were jealous of the canard that our Catholic colleagues, through a quick unburdening of the soul at confession of a Saturday evening, could clear the slate for an equally debauched week to follow.

If one had the energy, that is.

Given subsequent revelations about the predilections of the cloistered religious who taught them, it may have been hypocrisy writ large.

But I digress.

The matter at hand, so to speak, was to be handled by the College's doctor.

A veteran of the Second World War, although in a different Army, he was entitled to wear an impressive array of medal ribbons.

He also claimed that his unit had had something to do with camels, and he was rumoured to enjoy a drink after dinner.

It also turned out that he had a daughter close to our own age so that, resident within the College's confines, he no doubt had a more immediate and pressing reason to curb our potential sexual urges apart from his professional interest in our well being.

The lesson was held at night, after dinner, in the military instruction block, and was a welcome respite from the trials and tribulations of our barracks.

We were shown a film made in the 1950s by the British Army Kinematographic Corps titled, "The Choice is Yours!"

The plot involved a couple of lads just home from Malaya, one of whom had strayed sexually with a local lassie before his departure for home, and the other who had sowed upon return.

The former, a married man, reported to his Regimental Medical Officer with a weeping penis.

My memory may be faulty and I may be confused with subsequent apocryphal legends, but I seem to remember that he told the MO that he had "a cold in his dick.."

The MO's sensible and restrained response was to suggest that they should both wait until it sneezed.

Such it seems are the symptoms of primary syphilis, a disease with tertiary consequences, and which has carried off such luminaries as Lord Randolph Churchill, father of Sir Winston.

Modern drugs promptly applied offer a less traumatic conclusion, though the contemporary unfortunate was also warned off sex for twelve months, and had to face the prospect of arriving home to confess his unfortunate indiscretions and their consequences to his wife.

The other bloke arrived home to an invitation to a 'welcome home' party.

Here he met a school teacher, a supposedly respectable young lady with what in hindsight might be described as a "past"!

It was intimated that congress between the two occurred, followed apparently by irritated urination on the part of the male.

Gonorrhoea was diagnosed and a flow chart of her previous relations revealed Miss Chips to be a lady of easy virtue.

No doubt we would have laughed on cue, but for at least one of our number the lesson was more personal than apocryphal.

For some the lesson was that we should avoid school teachers at all costs.

Others commented that there was no mention of nurses.

For the opportunists amongst us, the flow chart indicated that an introduction to the right person was simply a passport to infinite pleasure!

The images portrayed in the film were, to put it mildly, quite graphic.

At this stage of our fledgling careers the sight of exposed male genitalia was quite familiar to us, since any modesty we might have possessed on enlistment was left behind at Point Hut.

However we were totally unprepared for those which had now been exposed to us in intimate technicolour detail in the training movie.

Today we have become quite accustomed to media campaigns employing graphic footage to assail our senses, but then the close up images of blue green ulcerated penile flesh oozing custard coloured secretions was more than some tender stomachs could bear.

After the movie, the doctor expanded on the theme of the three phases of syphilis, describing the horrific body dissolving symptoms of each, and finishing with a very realistic demonstration of the shambling gait of a person in the terminal stages of tertiary, syphilitic dementia.

From henceforth we would look carefully for manifestations of these symptoms among members of the staff and senior classes.

He then began to discuss adolescent males and their obsession with the female body.

He mentioned breasts, causing most of us to fantasise immediately about such temporarily abandoned but not forgotten pleasures.

“For the life of me,” he said, “I cannot understand what you see in them. They are simply overgrown sweat glands!”

No doubt there were many who closed their eyes at the moment of this erotic description to recall distant memories of finger tips or lips momentarily brushed over such sweet, succulent flesh voluntarily proffered by its owner.

Enlarged sweat glands indeed!

Indeed, there were some of us receiving letters from young ladies whose reciprocal deprivation was driving these sensual parts of their bodies into the arms, hands and mouths of more conveniently located suitors.

Bugger!

And at least one of our number, more worldly than most, had kept an anxious eye on the mail and a calendar in the immediate days after our arrival, as he eagerly awaited the news that impending parenthood was becoming less likely an outcome than it had seemed in the immediate aftermath of a passionate farewell.

Despite the concern that he apparently felt for our wellbeing, if not for that of his daughter, the doctor, a most practical man in other respects, seemed prepared to throw us a lifeline.

More practically and not so much a lifeline in the linear sense, it was more of a foil wrapped packet with a circular, rubber content.

For many of us this was to be our first encounter with a condom, an experience more academic and platonic than subsequent ones, but an introduction nonetheless to the Army’s practical largesse with a device whose proper function was forbidden to us all by College regulations, not to mention to a significant number by papal decree.

At least one of us asked at confession on the following weekend whether the mere sight of one of these forbidden objects constituted sufficient venal debit to place his mortal soul at eternal risk..

Assured that it didn’t, he nonetheless observed a strict regime of celibacy for some time until temptation and opportunity placed an irresistible obstacle in his path.

I have also since discovered that despite a condom’s usefulness, there is some reluctance to take credit for its origins.

It is known to Anglophones as a “French Letter;” to the French as an “English Sheath.”

In Australian circles it is familiarly referred to as a “Franger,” which seems to me to be an acceptable *Franglais* compromise.

Now made of latex and other synthetic materials, condoms were once made from the intestines of sheep.

Such beasts abounded in plenty at Point Hut!

Brand identification is also important, but a source of potential embarrassment.

In the Australian Army, asking for “Durex” meant sticky tape; in the British Army it meant the most popular brand of British condom.

Warned of the consequences of such careless requests in an international environment, I have been since advised that some of those innocent queries which resulted in an embarrassed response have been more than balanced by those which resulted in an unexpected though pleasurable opportunity.

As usual, I digress.

After our initial introductions, we would subsequently discover that condoms could also be used to prevent the ingress of foreign material into the barrels of weapons such as machine guns, when such material could hamper the smooth firing of those weapons after periods of extended travel in polluted conditions.

While a condom’s primary function is to contain a small amount of viscous fluid in a moment of passion, it seems that a .50 calibre round travelling at 750 feet per second is scarcely hampered by a thin membrane of rubber.

We would also discover that when carrying lead acid batteries in RAAF aircraft, a condom judiciously placed over the ventilated screw caps securing each cell could prevent the escape of corrosive acid or explosive gases.

These condoms were clearly not just the playthings of idle, self indulgent youths!

More importantly, when serving in far flung corners of the Empire, where leptospirosis, dengue and malaria reigned, and myriad vicious beasts such as tsetse flies, cobras and leeches lurked to do one harm, a condom worn as originally intended could prevent leeches, which apparently have a passion for such things, from entering the eye of one’s penis and causing, well, pain and discomfort.

These practical things we would later learn from the staff of the various military wings.

In the meantime, the doctor had more practical and immediate advice to offer.

Indeed, his largess extended to throwing several condoms among us, to be caught by grasping hands for various purposes.

Torn from their protective sachets, they were held aloft for the mirth of most, and the nostalgic reflections of some.

Bold souls blew them up as balloons, casting them aloft to allow us to indulge in callow mirth.

At least one practical soul managed to secure one and secrete it within the confines of his wallet, lest one of those circumstances against which the doctor had so recently warned us presented itself.

There it remained for several months, if not years; its embossed signature an expectant advertisement for a hoped-for opportunity, but silent testimony to forlorn hope.

In the fullness of time, opportunity did present itself.

At the appropriate moment the condom was retrieved, and applied with the necessary degree of mutual amusement that such occasions demand.

Stressed through the passage of time in the tortured confines of a cadet’s wallet, the integrity of its protective sachet punctured and its lubricative cocoon long since evaporated, at the critical moment, it failed.

The rest, as they say, is history.