

Get on the bus Granma!

We are on an expedition in Vancouver. This expedition requires the following components: - a skytrain, a "bendy bus" and a trolley bus. We have reach Commercial drive on the skytrain so the "bendy bus" is next.

Such a bus is at the stop on the other side of Broadway but the pedestrian lights are against our crossing over to it. I am certain we have missed it, because, by the time the pedestrian lights turn to the white walking personage, the bus is sure to have gone.

The light changes, we walk, the bus pulls up to the now red light, ready to go when the green light returns. We reach the sidewalk; the driver has the door open and is letting some stragglers onto the bus. I am sure he will not let us on. My smaller granddaughter says, "Get on the bus Granma" and being a good little girl I do as I am told...and off we go!

My granddaughter is five, I am nearly 65 but it seems to me she has a much more healthy attitude to taking a chance than I do. I am (still) an extremely obedient child. Gurus tell me that it is "my generation" – very unwilling to dispute with those we consider to be in authority – teachers, doctors, lawyers, parents, older people in general, bus drivers, etc. etc Like most things in life, there is a plus and a minus. While I am technically one of that generation, I am also very aware that the minus side of this approach to authority can really gets in the way.

Yes, I have made great strides from the 'terrified-of-the-consequences' person I used to be. My doctor has been known by his first name for over 20 years, I told my boss 18 years ago that I did not choose to work within the restricted budget parameters being requested of me – and walked away from my job and into my own business. However, to look back to where these fears come from, there is no doubt that, at that time, the consequences were dire.

If you are familiar with the Harry Potter books, you may recall that a lot of the activities relate to the four "houses" at Hogwarts. Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. You may remember that the Sorting Hat was a very important part of the new students' first week and Harry was relieved to be assigned to Gryffindor. As the story progresses, many of the things Harry and his friends do result in "points" or the loss of them for their "house".

JK Rowling did not invent this. This is very much a part of the British school system. Doing well for your house is very much a part of the day-to-day life of a school. We had four houses at the Grammar School named after local places. Every morning at assembly – we were all required to be there, each houses' standing was reviewed. Names were read out of those who had received GHPs (Good House Points) and more importantly, those who had BHPs (BAD house points!), even worse sinners, were those who had received BCPs (Bad Conduct Points worth 2 BHPs). Do note the word "bad"!

The ultimate humiliation was reserved for those who had accumulated 3 BHPs, which meant further public humiliation in the form of a Detention. The detention entailed a return to school on Saturday morning and was therefore somewhat tricky to keep from parents. The only one I had, I seem to remember having only had one detention, during which time I was required to write 500 lines. (For those of you unfamiliar with "lines" this meant writing the same sentence over and over and over again!). The usual format for this was "I will not be rude to the teacher" or something equally unedifying.

Not content with this daily recitation at the morning assembly, our report cards also recorded our transgressions for our parents. This reinforcing for them and us, what a not-so-perfect child they had living with them. The fear still haunts me. To my horror, it even pops up at what seems a most unexpected opportunity, even though I am now very old and (only) need to get on a bus!

These well-learned and established fears may cause us to step back when we should step forward. We can see the downside in many areas of our life and in the world around us. A fear of authority – blame your teacher, a fear of male power – blame your father, a fear of female power – blame your mother, a fear of religious leaders, police, politicians, government, the list is endless. The result can be a kind of paralysis, impeding our own ability to move forward. We wait for permission from those people whom we believe have the power to direct our lives.

We will never get on the bus, never get what we want, do what we want, be with whom we want or achieve our purpose for being here. But in the words of George Eliot, "It is never too late, to be what you might have been" and to quote another source, the Bible, "out of the mouths of babes, infants [and small girls], comes wisdom".

Get on the bus Granma...

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Durant". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Jane" and "Durant" being capitalized and prominent.

April 25th 2005 – copyright Jane Durant