

I believe a school teacher wrote a book some years ago with title "Friday Thank God". That phrase expresses perfectly my attitude to the arrival of the weekend during term time when I was a school boy. The daily grind of school, with its abundant homework, its fierce competition, the sense of never being able to relax, pressed heavily upon me in spite of the fact that I often enjoyed the actual classroom work. Waking up in the morning with the knowledge that one simply had to get out of bed, that there was no possibility of turning over for an extra doze, and seeing the hours of school stretching ahead, was a dismal experience, especially on a Monday. We had a maid once who would climb each morning with grim steps up to the attic floor where Lionel and I slept in one bedroom and my sister Sylvia in another, and announce in deep, funeral tones: "Lionel, David, Sylvia – time!" I used to lie waiting for that ominous tread on the uncarpeted attic stairs, and the voice it heralded sounded in my ears like a summons to damnation. The anticipation was always worse than the reality; I don't remember ever being especially unhappy in class; but the oppressive weight of the knowledge of a full day's school ahead remained a characteristic sensation of my childhood and disappeared only after I had left school and entered the university, where the smaller number of classes to be attended and the freedom of the student to come and go meant a completely new kind of academic world. To wake up on a Thursday morning to feel the end of the week already lying ahead: Friday morning was positively rose-coloured. The last 'period' (as each of our lessons was called) on a Friday, whatever the subject, had its special happy flavour of the end of the week, and one walked home from school on a Friday afternoon (however much homework had been assigned for the Monday) with the tread of an escaped prisoner. Friday night, with two solid days before school again, was the best night of the week; Saturday night, with still a whole day between it and Monday, was pleasant in a quite different way; Sunday night was full of the threat of Monday morning.

Sometimes there were unexpected respites – a half holiday to let us attend a football match which some unforeseen circumstances had caused to be cancelled the preceding Saturday, or the sudden dismissal of school an hour or two before the usual time because of some unexpected crisis or celebration. But these were few and far between. Once a term we had the annual mid-term holiday, a Monday off, which made a luxuriously long weekend (but it seemed to go just as fast as ordinary weekends), and occasionally in winter if there had been a continuous hard frost for some days we would get a whole day's 'skating holiday'. These were blessed breaks in routine, but not, of course, comparable to the holidays we got at Christmas and at Easter – three weeks each in my earlier school days, later tragically reduced to a fortnight and then (if my recollection of loss is not misleading me) to a mere ten days. But

'the' holidays were the summer holidays, the two months' vacation we got in the summer time, and it was these months towards which the whole year moved.

Two months seemed a long, long time in those days; indeed, I used to have the feeling that, for all practical purposes, I could look forward to a period of permanent felicity. I would walk home across the Meadows in the July sunshine, wearing my summer school clothes of grey cricket shirt, grey shorts, and red Wetson's blazer, and savour my happiness with conscious relish. I could hardly believe that three strenuous school terms had indeed rolled away and the longed for, dreamed of almost (it seemed at times) mythical summer holidays were at hand, unspoilt as yet, lying intact and promising just ahead. It all seemed too good to be true. Wishes didn't come true in this life – I knew that: all my early childhood I longed desperately for a tricycle, which my parents could never afford, and later the wish was transferred to a bicycle, and there, too I was permanently disappointed. (I bought my first bicycle for myself when I was twenty-one with prize money I had won at Edinburgh University). How often had I stood outside sweet shops with empty pockets longing for a penny or two to materialize somehow or hung on the outskirts of a crowd around an ice-cream barrow wondering whether the ice-cream man would be miraculously inspired to offer me a 'cornet' or a 'slider' free. These things never happened. (The few pence a week pocket money we received was to be put into a money box and saved, and during our early childhood Lionel, Sylvia and I never had anything to spend for ourselves). Yet summer and the summer holidays did come; the school year did come to an end; and one did find oneself at last standing by the trunks and suitcases outside No.6, Miller field Place, waiting for the taxi (glorious vehicle) that was to convey the family and its luggage to the railway station.

NOTES

Words Explained:

weekend :	Saturday and Sunday, sometimes Friday and Monday
grind :	hardwork
relax :	rest from work
doze :	sleep
dismal :	sad, without comfort
grim :	hard, cruel
funereal :	gloomy, dismal, dark
ominous :	being or giving bad omen
herald:	proclaim the approach of
damnation :	condemnation to hell
anticipation :	know, realize before hand

sensation :	being conscious of some effect on one's body, feeling
rose-coloured :	beautiful, pleasing
flavour :	quality of taste mixed with smell, special quality
respite :	time of rest
crisis :	time of great danger
routine :	regular, fixed order of doing things
felicity :	intense happiness
savour :	special taste or smell of something; suggestion of some quality
relish :	the special taste or quality of something, pleasing
strenuous :	using, needing great force, hardworking
mythical :	without existence in fact
materialize :	take form or shape
outskirts :	outer edge
miraculously :	in a strange unexpected way
inspire :	put thought or feeling into a person

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

1. What was the Daiches' attitude towards the weekend as a school boy? Why did he long for it?
2. What was his general view of school life?
3. He liked holidays for their freedom – freedom from what?
4. How did he spend his summer holidays?
5. Wishes don't come true in this life, writes Daiches. What are the things he longed for but could not have?
6. What did he do with his pocket money?
