

**Serfs and Peasants Text 3: “Blast to the Past”**

You Think YOU Have It Tough? Here's a Light Take on What Life Was Like a Thousand Years Ago, When Donkey Milk Was the Drink Du Jour.

Let's say you're 12 years old. You wake up at daybreak to a rooster's crow, jump into your woolen sack tunic and leggings, and grab a quick breakfast of donkey milk. Stepping outside, you help your father harness the oxen to furrow the earth on your family farm with an iron wheel.

Leading the oxen, you and dad plow, and plow, and plow some more until your mom calls you both in for a dinner of vegetable gruel and hard bread.

Such was the life of an ordinary 12-year-old living in Western Europe in the year 1001. So as we enter the 21st century, take a look back and see what a difference 365,000 days make!

**TOILET HOLES AND MOSS T.P.**

In the year 1001, the average kid's house was located on a small plot of land often owned by a wealthy lord. The floor was covered with straw that was crawling with insects. In the summer, the rank odor of sheep, cow, and horse dung dominated the home. It didn't help that farm animals such as pigs lived inside the house!

The bathroom was the pits--literally. It was a hole dug outside near the back of the house, and moss, grass, and leaves were used as toilet paper. No one actually took a bath there. Streams and ponds served as bathtubs during warm weather. During winter, water for bathing was heated over the fire.

**DO YOU DROOL FOR GRUEL?**

Kids often dined on hard bread baked the week earlier and vegetable porridge, a soupy, oatmeal-like concoction. Forks weren't popular for another 600 years, so everyone chowed down with their hands.

Chicken and beef were luxuries, so kids ate pickled pork. On special occasions, mom would make a tasty sausage treat. Its main ingredient: pig's blood.

But lucky medieval kids didn't have to eat spinach, broccoli, and brussels sprouts. Those veggies wouldn't appear in Europe for several hundred years. On the menu instead were peas, beans, and cabbage.

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**LET'S TOSS AROUND THE OLD PIG BLADDER**

Sports-minded peasant boys played their own version of football with an inflated pig bladder. Girls engaged in footraces.

The medieval versions of TV, CDs, and Internet entertainment were storytelling and singing. Adults told kids tales of heroic warriors slaying dragons to protect villagers.

**IF YOU CAN READ THIS, YOU'RE TOO MODERN**

Kids didn't go to school, so most people never learned to read or write. Instead, they memorized and recited long, complicated folk poems taught by their elders.

Though poems taught kids about history and culture, other bits of information may have been better left UNTAUGHT, like the idea that infection was caused by evil spirits firing invisible darts at the body. Of course, you couldn't blame the adults--with little scientific knowledge, medieval folks explained things the only way they knew how.

**HOME SHOPPING NETWORK**

Shopping malls? They're a distant dream. So mom made woolen tunics for kids to wear all year long.

Medieval villagers may not have had much by today's standards, but most people didn't think about stealing. There were no prisons, so wealthy thieves and murderers could pay a fine to get out of trouble. The alternative for the rest? Whipping, branding, head-shaving, or hanging to death.

**TOUCH A DEAD MAN'S TOOTH AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING**

Almost all families lived in villages, often near dense forests full of firewood and berries. And though wild animals and outlaws lurked in the forest, the villagers hid there from pillaging Vikings. Without a police force, villagers were on their own.

Villagers were also without doctors and dentists, but they didn't worry too much. For a toothache, they could be "cured" by touching the tooth of a dead man. (If it didn't work, the live person's tooth could always be pulled.) And using the boiled-down fat of a recently dead criminal would cure just about any ailment.

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**HITCHED BY 14, HISTORY BY 40**

By her early teens, a girl from the noble class was married, often to a much older man.

A peasant girl didn't get hitched until she was older. But if she were still single by her mid-20s, she could always become a spinning wheel operator. (Guess where the word "spinster" comes from!) Then she'd have time for a nice long career--if she were lucky enough to live to 40!

Yep, life was short back in the year 1001. But who says it wasn't sweet, as well? After all, a strong sense of family and hardly any crime are things we could all use a little more of.

And of course, no school or spinach would be nice, too!

Smith, Michael N. "Blast to the Past." *National Geographic World*. Feb. 2001: 16-18. *SIRS Discoverer*. Web. 18 Feb. 2014.

Serfs and Peasants Text 3: “Blast to the Past”

<b>Serfs and Peasants Text 3: “Blast to the Past” Glossary</b>	
<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
du jour	of the day (French)
furrow	making trenches in the ground
gruel	a thin liquid of oatmeal or another grain boiled in milk or water
rank	very unpleasant
chowed down	ate
pillaging	rob