**Essays on Mount Crosby - School Chores**

In my "days of the old school yard", which were those happy ones that crossed between the 1960s and 70s, someone devised a set of school chores with an edginess that compensated for the fact that no-one had invented anything in the shape of a magic slate. Once or twice a week for half an hour after lunch we (big and small students of the 35 strong school) were rostered onto jobs whose names still bring me a cheer from their connotation of interesting outdoorsiness: by jobs I mean "paths", "gardens", "drains", a few others that I can't recall, and the wonderful "incinerator".

"Incinerator"! Yes, the school would let you do something your parents probably wouldn't.

"Incinerator" was good, but my day was made when it was drains for me. Actually, I need to make a small correction here - there was really only one drain; it was a beautiful concrete half pipe that ran beside the main school building and occasionally caught a leaf or two before disappearing beneath the parade ground and emptying onto the school's bottom field (that's what we called it because the shape was otherwise indescribable).

I can't think of the reason for the drain's pre-eminence - perhaps it blocked up once at a critical time or had a discarded sandwich left in it during a school inspector's visit or something. All we knew is it had to be kept as clean as fingernails.

The method of cleaning it was all of the interest. Water was made to enter the drain at a rate faster than it could disappear, aided by a number of shoeless little feet stuck in the drainage pit. To manage this, a small team of students was employed to turn on every remotely connected tap. Then, when the water had reached a satisfying depth, a larger student ran from one end of the drain to the other with an upturned Dutch hoe splaying the water onto as many onlookers as possible. We always appreciated the spectacle and I remember thinking, without knowing the word for it, how perfect it was that the Dutch hoe just fitted the drain. Serendipity.

In seven years, I never saw that hoe used for another thing. It was the drain hoe, its discoverer remains unknown. I can't even tell you which came first, the Dutch hoe or the drain.

Col Hester