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Tortures, Jealousy Tests and Getting Tough

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Abstract

I tortured Jenny Little, now an actress in London, with the Chinese burn. Telephone Jenny Little in East Sheen and ask her if she remembers being tortured at Nowra Infants School near the Headmistress's garden with the Chinese burn. The garden where you found nuts you could shoot at each other's eyes with your thumb. Along from the trees which at the right time of the year provided the rough nuts on the end of a stalk, a blow from which could cause a headache. Or if these were out of season, you could roll your handkerchief and twist it into a cosh which each year had to be banned because of headaches. You had to be careful or the girls would hold you down and kiss you.

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they smothered. Or gagging someone with a dirty handkerchief and tying them up and leaving them. Tortures can be used to extract secrets or to make someone cry. You can give yourself a 240 volt shock by biting hard on both little fingers, linking the fingers and pulling sharply. If the light shines through the palms of your hand when you hold a torch to it you will always be broke when you grow up. If the letter M appears in the lines on the palms of your hands you'll marry.

A blow to the temple will kill, a blow to the throat will cause choking (ask Clive Robertson who was hit near the bubblers). You can hit someone in the throat if he is older. A blow to stomach will cause winding, a blow to the jaw will cause unconsciousness. No hitting below the belt. No punching in the kidneys. Is being unconscious the same as being asleep or is it more like being dead or more like being hypnotized. What's being hypnotized like? What happens when a girl faints like Isabella Smart. Place your palms together, cross your thumbs: if the right thumb goes over the left you'll be a boss, if the left thumb goes over the right you're artistic. The monkey grip cannot be broken. You'll die if you swallow your tongue. If you have flat feet you cannot join the commandoes and you'll never win a race. If you close your eyes and hold your breath, black will become white and you will see the stars. Holding your breath underwater until you see stars is good for your condition. If you punch with your thumb inside your fist you'll break your thumb. Girls can spit, bite, slap, pinch and pull hair. Boys can punch, thump, strangle and kick. Turning around in circles with your eyes shut is a way of making yourself sick if you have to. If you rub hair oil in your hands or pepper tree leaves, a caning won't hurt. Never admit to an enemy that anything can hurt you. Can you whistle by putting your little fingers in the corners of your mouth? A boy may pinch a girl's backside but nowhere else. A girl can pinch anywhere. Boys can tickle girls and vice versa. Tickling someone can send them mad. You blind a cat by putting soap powder in its eyes which could be used against an enemy or pepper. You can give someone a horse bite by savagely grasping the flesh at the top of the arm with your hand. You can give someone a rabbit killer by chopping them on the back of the neck with the edge of hand. You can give a cork leg by kicking someone's thigh with your knee. Can you pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time? Can you touch your nose with your tongue? Can you roll your eyes until only the whites are showing? If you hold someone's arm in a bucket of water they'll have to go to the lavatory. If you make the other person's nose bleed you've won. If you pin someone's arm to the ground to the count of three you've won. If you

twist someone's arm up their back until they say give in, you've won. Eating raw ginger and standing on your head for long periods are ways of becoming tough. You can stick a pin through the skin of your finger and it doesn't hurt. If you suck the soft part of your under arm you can give yourself a love bite. Knuckles is the toughest game there is. Hold your clenched fist against another boy's fist and count one-two-three. The fastest boy brings his knuckles down on the other's knuckles as hard as he can, causing immense pain. Drinking ink can kill you. Filling your mouth with water and wiping away any trace of it and then going up to someone and spitting it in their face is a form of surprise attack. Wiping snot on someone is another form of attack. Squeezing someone just above the knee with two fingers is a way of testing if they're jealous. If hairs grow on your legs it means you're becoming a man. If you hate hairs on your legs you shouldn't admit it. If you close your eyes while cleaning your teeth you're a homosexual. Hairs on the palms of your hands means you masturbate. If you look to see — that proves it. Grabbing another boy's cock is supposed to hurt and he is supposed to do it back to you. You're not supposed to show you like it. Wrestling until you get an erection is permissible as long as you both pretend it's a wrestle. A possum bite comes back at the same time every year at the same place you were bitten. A hanging willow makes good whips for whipping slave girls. When the girl who is playing nurse bandages your legs with dock leaves and binds them with vines, things happen in your groin. Girls walk differently after they've had their first sex. And you can tell.

Mechanical Aptitude

Pass the stillsons. They are not the stillsons. I told you what the stillsons were last time. These are the stillsons. Now stand out of the way. Do you always have to stand in the light. No, that's not the one. I wanted the small one. Do I have to do everything myself. Now you're spilling it everywhere. Well, be more careful in future. In future use your head. Just take it slowly. You're spilling it, you're spilling it on my boots. Wake up

Australia. Your mind's a thousand miles away. You've put that on the wrong way around. It's screwed on back to front. How did you manage to do that. You can't find it. How can you not find it. If it were a snake it would bite you. How do you mean 'it just came off'. How could it 'just come off'. Why do these things happen to you and to no one else. Now stand out of the light. Now look what you've done. You wouldn't know it from a bar of soap. You wouldn't know if it was up you. If it was any nearer it would bite you. Look where you're going for godsake. Two left feet. Not that way, do it the way I showed you. All thumbs. How did it take so long. Where the hell did you get to. The lavatory — how many times a day do you have to go to the lavatory. Now pass that piece up to me. Not that piece — the other piece. How many times do I have to tell you. You don't listen. Here give it to me, I'll do it myself. Not that way, the other way. It's self explanatory. Well no one asked your opinion. Well it's not up to you. Well it's not up to you. What, precisely, do you think you're doing now. Well your best isn't good enough. Watch out behind you. Watch out you'll break that window. Take that smirk off your face. It's no laughing matter. I wouldn't want to have my life depending on it. I wouldn't want to be holding my breath. So's Christmas. Don't waste it. It's not hot enough. You've let it go cold. How did that get chipped. Look at that mess. You call that tidy. What about in the corners. Don't force it. Hey dreamy, wake up — Australia needs you. You wouldn't know if it was up you. I'll explain it all once more. I'm not going to tell you again. Look where you're going for Christsake. Is that what you call sharp. Can't you tell just by looking at it. Where do you think you're going now. Looking isn't going to fix it. What time do you think it is. It screws out, it doesn't pull out. Watch out for that wall. Come here and watch so that you'll know next time. Don't stand in the light. Just stay out of the road. What do you think this is — a picnic? What do you think this is — bush week? Well, there may not be a next time. Now look what you've done. It's no laughing matter. How long's a piece of string. If brains were dynamite you'd be safe. Where were you when the brains were handed out. Take the other end. This end, not that end. Not that way. Now get a proper grip of it. You're holding it like a girl. You take as long as an old woman. Left to right, not right to left. Clockwise not anti-clockwise. No, the other way dummy. Measure it again. Use a little elbow grease. Use a little nouce. Use a little brain power. Use a little brawn. Fellows of Australia, blokes and coves and coots, get a bloody move on, have some bloody sense. Measure it before you cut it. Hold it straight. It's as crooked as a dog's hind leg. That's not

how I showed you. Now do it again and get it right this time. That's not very smart. Don't they teach you anything at school. And you're supposed to be bright. Now look what you've gone and done. Start over again. Holy cow — how did you manage to do that. It's in the bottom compartment of the tool box at the back of the truck under the coils of wire, the black handled one, not the other one, and the tinsnips and a five-eighths coachhead screw. What do you mean, you can't see it. Use your eyes. I told you to check it before you did it. And put things back where you found them. What sort of knot do you call that. That nut doesn't go with that bolt. Can't you just tell. That's not mixed enough. That's not hard enough. That's not long enough. It won't bite you. Take hold of it. It's not going to eat you. Easy does it. You're worse than a girl. Get a move on, we haven't got all day. Shine the torch where I'm working. No not there, over here. Hold it steady. Now pull. Pull harder. That's enough for godsake. Now look what you've gone and done. In future, stop when I say stop. Don't jerk it. You'll strip the thread. Can't you get it tighter than that. Now I'll tell you once more: this is the nosing, this is the waist, and this is the riser, and this is the thread, and this is called the going, and this is called the going of the flight, and we call this the raking rise. Got it? Frightened to get your hands dirty. Frightened of a few blisters. Short of puff. Put your hand in and get it out. It won't bite you. Don't just stand there, do something. What are you — an old woman. No one asked your opinion. Get your finger out. Get a move on. What did I tell you. What do you mean you can't see it. What do you mean you can't find it. What do you mean you didn't bring it. What do you mean you left it behind. What do you mean you thought we wouldn't need it. What do you mean you didn't think it mattered. Watch out for the wall for godsake. Do it once and do it right. You can't possibly see from over there. Don't throw it, hand it to me. Do I have to do everything myself. Now look what you've gone and done. Frightened to get your hands dirty. It won't eat you. You're worse than a girl. What do you mean, you didn't think it mattered. And what, precisely, do you think you're doing now?

Both these pieces are from work in progress called *The Oral History of Childhood*.