

# Growing Up 90s

By Aidan Harris

Everyday I feel lucky to have spent my teenage years in the 90s, in that narrow gap between analogue childhood and digital adulthood. Life was slower but louder. You waited for things – albums, letters, the phone to ring – and the waiting gave it weight. Anticipation wasn't frustrating – it was fun, and it was everywhere.

The decade smelled of Lynx Africa and pub ashtrays, full of bus rides into town to buy a cassette single, DM bootlaces and a bag of pic'n'mix. The high street was our map of belonging – Our Price, Woolworths, Athena. You rarely bought things, you were just there.

Music wasn't background noise, it was identity lived out via the lyrics you wrote on your pencil case. We recorded off the radio, finger hovering over the pause button, hoping the DJ wouldn't talk over the intro ruining that mixtape you were making for someone special. Some moments felt almost biblical – standing in a sea of bodies to watch Oasis at Knebworth, every song a national anthem, convinced you were present at a moment that would be remembered forever.

We were told that Things Can Only Get Better and, for a brief moment, it felt like the whole country believed it. The Cold War was history, the ozone hole was shrinking and a benign future was possible. There were moments when the national mood cracked too – the silent flowers outside a tunnel in Paris, and the occasional explosion in a city centre reminding us that optimism was not immunity. The nerds told us that the “information superhighway” was about to change life forever, but we just laughed and went back to our £2 pints. And when it eventually arrived – on a stack of floppy disks and a screeching modem - it was too gimmicky and slow to steal our attention. Back then, Google was called Ceefax and no one asked us to prove we weren't a robot.

Television was anarchic and collective. Days began with *The Big Breakfast* and ended with *The Word*, beaming rebellion into our homes. We watched the Thirty Years of Hurt continue, as Southgate missed in '96 and Beckham was booed in '98. Our freedom felt safe – a bike, a railcard, a parent knowing you were “out somewhere”. We learned independence by being trusted with it. We chose carefully which memories to keep, on rolls of 24 or 36. The best moments we viewed with our eyes, not through a phone screen, and the embarrassing ones couldn't haunt us online forever. The world wasn't delivered to us instantly in our pockets. If you wanted it you had to go out and find it, question it, absorb it – and you *always* longed for more.

Growing up 90s felt like standing on a platform before the train arrived. We didn't know the destination, only that it was coming. It was a time to wait without distraction, and to belong without broadcasting. We were shaped by anticipation and optimism. And when the train finally came it moved fast.