

### □ Lesson Objectives

- Read a memoir about life before the digital age
- Learn vocabulary related to memory and nostalgia
- Use the past perfect to sequence events in the past
- Understand the difference between past simple and past perfect
- Discuss how life has changed over the past decades
- Write a short memoir about a personal memory

## 1 Before You Read

- What is your earliest memory? How old were you?
- How was daily life different 50 years ago? What was better, what was worse?
- Could you live without the internet for one month?

## 2 Reading: Before the Screens Took Over

*My granddaughter asked me last week what life was like before the internet. I laughed at first, but then I realised she was completely serious.*

My name is Vera, and I turned seventy-eight this spring. I was born in northern England in 1948, three years after the war **had ended**. The country was still recovering — food rationing **had not yet finished**, and buildings **had been damaged** during the bombings. My father, who **had served** in the army for five years, rarely spoke about what he **had seen**. My mother, who **had worked** in a munitions factory, never complained.

We had no television. The first set **had not arrived** until 1955. I remember Mr. Patterson inviting the whole neighbourhood to watch a broadcast. We **had never seen** anything like it. Before that evening, all our entertainment **had come** from the radio, books, and each other. Nobody **had ever heard** of social media. By the time I left school at sixteen, I **had already decided** to become a nurse. I moved to Manchester, a city I **had visited** only once. It was 1964. The world was expanding. I shared a tiny dormitory with three girls. None of us **had ever lived** away from home. We wrote letters every Sunday. Nobody **had imagined** video calls.

I married Tom in 1970. By then, I **had been working** as a nurse for six years. We grew vegetables, spent holidays at the seaside with a flask of tea. We **had never flown** on a plane.

By retirement in 2003, the hospital **had completely transformed**. Paper records **had been replaced** by computers. Patients looked up symptoms online. It was overwhelming at first.

Do I miss the old days? Sometimes — the slowness, the silence, the conversations that **had not yet been replaced** by texts. But I do not romanticise the past. Life was harder. Opportunities for women were fewer. The past was not better — it was different. And the only way to appreciate how far we have come is to remember where we started.

### 3 Vocabulary

Word	Definition	Example
<b>recovering</b>	returning to normal	<i>The economy was recovering.</i>
<b>rationing</b>	limiting food/goods	<i>Rationing lasted years.</i>
<b>ruins</b>	remains of destroyed buildings	<i>The church lay in ruins.</i>
<b>munitions</b>	weapons and ammunition	<i>A munitions factory.</i>
<b>neighbourhood</b>	local area where you live	<i>A close-knit neighbourhood.</i>
<b>broadcast</b>	TV or radio programme	<i>The broadcast reached millions.</i>
<b>entertainment</b>	activities for enjoyment	<i>Radio was the main entertainment.</i>
<b>expanding</b>	growing larger	<i>The city was expanding.</i>
<b>dormitory</b>	shared sleeping room	<i>A small dormitory.</i>
<b>vegetable</b>	plant grown for food	<i>She grew vegetables.</i>
<b>seaside</b>	area near the sea	<i>A week at the seaside.</i>
<b>flask</b>	container for hot drinks	<i>A flask of tea.</i>
<b>symptoms</b>	signs of illness	<i>Described her symptoms.</i>
<b>overwhelming</b>	too much to handle	<i>New tech was overwhelming.</i>
<b>romanticise</b>	make seem better than it was	<i>We romanticise the past.</i>

Word	Definition	Example
<b>opportunity</b>	chance for something positive	<i>Education creates opportunities.</i>

**Collocations:** look back on • get on with life • grow up • leave behind • the good old days • times have changed • before my time • in those days

## 4 Grammar: Past Perfect

### □ In the Text, You Saw...

- "The war **had ended** three years before I was born."
- "We **had never seen** anything like it."
- "By the time I left school, I **had already decided** to become a nurse."
- "I **had been working** as a nurse for six years."

Past perfect shows one past event happened before another. It creates clear sequence.

Form	Structure	Example
<b>Affirmative</b>	had + pp	She had finished before I arrived.
<b>Negative</b>	hadn't + pp	They hadn't eaten when I called.
<b>Question</b>	Had + subj + pp?	Had you met him before?
<b>Continuous</b>	had been + -ing	I had been waiting for two hours.

### □ Past Perfect vs Past Simple

Past Simple + Past Simple (chronological): "I arrived and she left." (I arrived, then she left)  
 Past Perfect + Past Simple (earlier + later): "When I arrived, she had already left." (she left first)  
 Time markers: by the time, before, after, already, just, never, until, when, by then

### △ Common Mistakes

- "When I arrived, she already left." → □ "... had already left."
- "I had gone to the shop yesterday." → □ "I went..." (one event = past simple)
- "After I had ate..." → □ "After I had eaten..." (past participle needed)

## 5 □ Exercise: Put Events in Order

1. The war ended (1945)
2. Vera was born (1948)
3. Food rationing ended
4. First TV arrived in street (1955)
5. Vera moved to Manchester (1964)
6. Vera married Tom (1970)
7. Vera and Tom bought a car (1973)
8. Vera retired (2003)

9. Paper records replaced by computers
10. Granddaughter asked about the internet

## 6 Comprehension Quiz

1. When was Vera born?

Answer: 1948

2. What had her father done during the war?

Answer: He had served in the army

3. How did people get entertainment before TV?

Answer: Radio, books, and each other

4. What does Vera say about the past?

Answer: It was different, not necessarily better

5. 'When I arrived, she \_\_\_ already \_\_\_.' — tense?

Answer: Past Perfect

6. Correct: By the time I arrived, she had left.

Answer: Yes — past perfect for earlier event

7. 'By 20, I \_\_\_ three countries.' (visit)

Answer: had visited

8. When don't we need past perfect?

Answer: When there's only one past event

## 7 Fill in the Blanks

**Phrases: had already started • had never met • had just left • hadn't eaten • had read • had travelled • had painted • had cut**

1. By the time I arrived, the film \_\_\_.
2. She \_\_\_ him before the party.
3. When we got to the station, the train \_\_\_.
4. I was hungry because I \_\_\_ all day.
5. After she \_\_\_ the letter, she cried.
6. By 30, he \_\_\_ to ten countries.
7. They \_\_\_ the house before moving in.
8. I didn't recognise her — she \_\_\_ her hair.

□ **Answers:** 1. had already started • 2. had never met • 3. had just left • 4. hadn't eaten • 5. had read • 6. had travelled • 7. had painted • 8. had cut

## 8 □ Speaking & Writing

### □ Discussion Questions

1. What is the biggest change compared to your grandparents' time?
2. Do people romanticise the past? Is life getting worse or just different?
3. By the time you started school, what had you already learned at home?
4. If you could visit any decade, which would you choose?
5. How will people in 2075 look back on our time?

### □ Example Dialogue

- A: My grandmother says by 20 she had already started working.  
B: Mine too! She had left school at 15 and gone straight to a factory.  
A: By 20, I hadn't even decided what to study!  
B: She says people had been more connected before phones.  
A: Before phones took over, people had spent more time face to face.  
B: Times have changed, haven't they?

### ✍ Writing Task

Write 80–120 words about a memorable event from your past:

- What happened? Set the scene.
- What had happened before the main event?
- How did you feel? What had you never experienced before?

Use the past perfect at least 4 times to sequence events.

## 9 □ Review Checklist

### I can now...

- understand a memoir about life before the digital age
- use vocabulary related to memory, nostalgia and change
- use the past perfect to show which event happened first
- distinguish between past simple and past perfect
- use time markers like by the time, before, already, never
- write a short memoir sequencing events with the past perfect



## **Congratulations!**

You have completed Lesson 8: Looking Back.