

Imagine

Imagine that it is the year 2054. So that's 30 years from now.

St Mary's primary school children have been given a history project, with the title

'Being alive 30 years ago – what was it like?'

And you, as someone who was alive in 2024 – and is still alive in 2054! – have volunteered to face a group of small school children to answer some of the questions they have found most puzzling about life 30 years ago.

In preparation for your school visit, you spend time trying to remember what was happening in your own life in 2024 and also researching old copies of newspapers in the Penzance library and online.

The day arrives, and you make your way to the school – a bit nervous, but excited and feeling that you are prepared to answer any questions which the children might ask.

After checking in at reception, you are led down a corridor to a classroom. In front of you are 10 ten-year-olds, pencils in hand ready to capture your every word.

The teacher invites the children to ask their questions.

A little girl puts up her hand and reads out her carefully prepared question ...

"We've been reading about life 30 years ago, stories about wars, huge numbers of people starving and homeless, and poisons in the seas and soil and air, and many dying species of wildlife. We're still feeling the effects of all this. How much of this did you know about?"

A second question from a boy in the back row ...

"What was it like for you to live with this knowledge?"

And a third question – this time from another little girl ...

"What did you do about it?"

Gosh, you hadn't expected questions like this. You find yourself struggling for answers – saying something like yes, you did know about it, then explaining that you felt helpless and that it was something which you would leave for others to deal with. Governments and big businesses.

The children thank you for your honest answers, but seem rather disappointed and confused ... and look up at their teacher, thinking that they had maybe asked you an inappropriate question, but the teacher just nodded, as if to say, no, those were exactly the right questions to ask, because she too had looked forward to more helpful answers.

Throughout the morning, other questions come from children, and you do your best to answer them, but keep thinking about your inadequate responses to those first three questions.

Let's bring ourselves back to 2024.

How do you feel after reading this?

(The three questions were adapted from 'Active Hope' by Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone)