

Ninety Years and Counting

I was born ninety years ago to parents and grandparents who had experienced World War One, the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, and hardships of the Great Depression. A 1932 issue of The National Geographic Magazine shows soup-lines, shanty towns, families living in cars, tired hungry looking children and adults; people without what we consider the basic necessities of life. The unemployment rate was 24 percent. Soup kitchens fed many while others went hungry. Hard times were not limited to the United States. The Depression was felt worldwide.

Adding further hard times, the dust bowl blew away the hopes of many and made times even harder. There were tales of tumbleweed soup, feelings of hopelessness and dust, and dust, and dust... That was to the west of where we lived, but it impacted the economy even further and added more men to the ones who rode Frisco freight cars and got off along the way. Men who walked up the road looking for an odd job that would provide a meal. Men who were tired and haggard and on the verge of giving up hope. Men who appreciated a drink of cold water and a leftover biscuit or piece of chicken. Who would split kindling, stack wood, or do odd jobs. Men who would walk on up the road. Not knowing, but hoping...

In news of the day, Al Capone was convicted of tax evasion. Ghandi began his fast to death in protest of British support of the new Indian Constitution, which favored separating the Indian electorate by caste. But all was not gloom, doom and despair. In a ceremony at The White House, President Hoover presented Amelia Earhart with the National Geographic Society Award for being the first woman to fly the Atlantic solo. Mrs. Hoover was present along with Dr. Gilbert Grosvenor of the Society and representatives of the branches of government. Earhart was the first woman to receive the award.

In thumbing through the old magazine, I see an ad for The Lincoln V-8 Cylinder ... Two Window Town Sedan ... \$3,100 at Detroit. Way beyond my family's means. We could have bought a Crosley Electric

Refrigerator with all the latest features for \$89.50, but we didn't have electricity – or \$89.50. American Telephone and Telegraph advertised their 'Sentinel of the Night,' a telephone...ready to call a policeman at the first unexplained sound, summon the fire department at the first whiff of smoke, rouse a doctor, nurse or neighbor when illness intrudes. (My goodness, even stronger than the sales pitch I learned as a service rep some 40 years later.)

There was a message to membership of the National Geographic Society from George W. Hutchison, Associate Secretary, that every month twenty mail cars loaded with cargoes of Geographics start their journeys from Washington D.C. Over a million copies are delivered to members. It goes on to tell how many copies are distributed to various cities. 'The magazine quite naturally is concentrated most heavily in those areas and neighborhoods where income are highest and standard of living are above average.' A little snob appeal? We were not subscribers at that time. Later we were. I couldn't bear to throw away copies and paid 60 cents a pound to move them from Seattle to Fort Smith. We gave Mother a subscription. After she became crippled by arthritis and could no longer walk, she traveled the world from her front porch.

In my ninety years, I've seen amazing change. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who campaigned on a 'New Deal' was elected in November 1932. Times changed. There was work! There was hope! And there was Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig! World War Two added many more jobs. There were feelings of unity and patriotism. The country has come a long way in my ninety years.

My own personal journey has been blessed by God-fearing parents, a good and kind husband who viewed me as his partner, children who did us proud, amazing grandchildren, and beautiful and talented great-grandchildren. Along the way, I've traveled to many countries, seen amazing sights, and have a world of precious memories. A great first Ninety! Thanks be to God!

Tess Todd 7/18/2022