

20's, 30's, and 40's

As I look back over four score years, it has been my good fortune to see many accomplishments in this country. Probably more advancements occurred during that time than in all history prior to my generation. From the Model T to the Jet Age, electricity for the masses, plumbing, radios, televisions, cell phones to space ships.

Also, we have witnessed some great crises during this time – the Great Depression, WWII, the Korean War, Kennedy assassination, Vietnam War, 70's oil crisis, 9/11, and this current financial crisis.

Since I am the senior member of this group, I have been asked to make some remarks about how it was in my youth. I was born in 1919, nine months after the armistice of WWI, the so called, “war to end all wars.” Woodrow Wilson was president. I grew up during the roaring 20's, the depression of the 30's and WWII 40's. Some of these memories I can relate to you today.

The first car my parents had was a 1919 Model T followed by a 1923 Model T. In those days gasoline stations were scarce so we had gasoline delivered to the farm and stored in a 50 gallon barrel in the garage. The gas tank on the Model T was under the driver's seat with gravity flow to the engine. Before starting the car we always raised the driver's seat to check how much gas was in the tank. A ruler like tool with gallon marks was placed through the fill port to tell how much gas was in the tank. Model T's had no fuel pump or fuel injector so the gasoline had to flow via gravity to the engine. We lived at the top of a hill and if the tank was near empty, gas was too low in the tank to gravity flow to the engine so the car had to back down the hill, turn around and go up the hill in reverse, thus the engine was lower than the gas tank. Liquid only flows down hill!! The

next car was a 1928 Model A. The gas tank was in front of the windshield and sort of over the engine.

We had no electricity and no plumbing. The little house out back was referred to as a one holer or a two holer. A large family needed more than one position. We had a 2 position house out back that was big enough for 3 positions, but we had to have room for the Sears Roebuck catalogue.

In my growing up years we did not have frozen food, penicillin, polio shots, radar, credit cards, ball point pens, cell phones, computers, or television sets. We were before dishwashers, clothes dryers, and electric blankets. Coke was something you drank if you had a nickel and pot was something you cooked in. You could buy a new Chevy or Ford for \$600-\$700, but few people had that kind of money. We made do with what we had. And we were the last generation so dumb as to think you needed a husband to have a baby.

We did have a telephone part of the time. We lived at the end of a party line of 10 families. Telephones got their power from dry cell batteries stored in the wall phones in each home. It was more difficult to hear for people who lived further from the central office in town. If one phone rang all phones on the line rang. Each home had a certain ring. Ours was a short long short. Others were a combination of short, long, etc. Since we lived at the end of the line, it was sometimes difficult to hear. Mrs. Cora Miller lived about midway to town and always listened to conversations. She would repeat loudly what the caller said and usually we could hear better. I think she listened to all the phone calls because she always knew the news. Her name was Cora Miller, a daughter of

“Black” Jim Wall and a cousin of Jessie and Frank James. Her efforts were harmless and her services appreciated.

By today’s standards we were poor people because of living conditions, lack of conveniences, etc., but I always thought we were middle class. Some people did not have as much as we did. My oldest cousin on my dad’s side was barely old enough to serve in WWI. He was sent to France where he drove a mule team and hauled ammunition to the troops on the front lines as the US troops helped defeat the Germans in 1918. About WWII era he told me his family always envied my family during the depression because it appeared to them that we had everything. We always had a car and we always had a hired man. The hired man was there all year to help with farm work and care for the livestock when the kids were in school. He and his family lived in the house on the farm we called, “The Other Place.” He was paid every Saturday.

We had a cow herd to raise calves for market. We also milked several cows for milk and cream. The milk was always run through a cream separator and the cream was taken to town to sell. The skimmed milk was for cooking and drinking. Surplus milk was fed to the hogs. We had a few brood sows to raise pigs for market and for butchering. Grain raised on the farm was fed to the hogs and other livestock. We always had a flock of chickens to produce eggs for sale and table use. In the early spring we would order 100-200 baby chickens. We had a brooder house with an oil heater. These chicks would be big enough to eat in 10-12 weeks. We ate part of them and put most of the hens in the hen house with the egg producers. We may have gotten more chicks as the summer went on. We also had a herd of sheep that provided two sources of income each year. In May, the sheep were sheared and the wool was sold as a cash crop. The

ewes produced an average of 1-1/2 lambs each year and the lambs were ready for market in the fall of the year, so this was a second source of income from sheep.

We had a big garden near the house and an additional spot of an acre or more where we raised vegetables for canning and future use. We called the additional garden spot the “truck patch”. We usually planted a few watermelons and cantaloupe in the truck patch.

Some say the depression began with the stock market collapse in 1929. As we got into the 30s, it was worse. In 1933 all banks were closed, some never to open again. We had two banks in Iberia – Farmers & Traders Bank and the Bank of Iberia. My parents did business with the Bank of Iberia and it did reopen in a few days. The other bank never opened again. With loan payments and interest due many good customers, such as good farmers, were unable to pay. Many farmers lost their farms. My parents were worried too, because they owed money and were unable to pay. Dad went to see Mr. Farnham, President at the Bank of Iberia. After a little discussion, Mr. Farnham said “Wade, you go home, take care of your family, send the kids to school, we are not going to let you lose your farm”. What a relief!

It was during the early 30s after the stock market crashed that farm prices soon followed. Then we had 2 sever draughts in 1933 and 1935. In one of those years when the thrashing machine came through our neighbor Elmer Barton (who was in the process of losing his farm) had a crop of oats to thrash. He wanted to sell the oats but had no buyers. Dad finally bought the oat crop for 10 cents per bushel and we hauled them home for feed. That was a low price for the crop, but Mr. Barton got the crop sold.

Our benevolent government determined about that time that many farmers had too many cattle and too many hogs. We must get rid of some of them and the government would make a payment for the surplus. A government rep was sent to farms to determine how many were surplus. I remember walking with the rep and dad to see the cows. Dad would select certain ones that he planned to sell anyway. But the government rep would not accept them. He would select the ones to buy. No negotiations. The price was \$25 per cow if she weighed 1000-1200 lbs. Those were some of our best. Then some hog producers were told they had to get rid of surplus pigs. The surplus was drowned in the Osage River. We did not have too many pigs. It was an odd system.

It was in the drought year of 1933 or 35 when we didn't get any rain all summer. Pastures dried up and we would cut down live elm trees so the cattle could eat the green leaves. We did rent an idle 120 acres down below Brumley that had nothing on it but wild grass and elm sprouts and it had not been used all year. We drove a bunch of cows and calves down there and they had something to eat the rest of the summer.

It was obvious the corn crop would not make much that year so dad went to the University of Missouri extension agent to learn more about a temporary silo. A few people had silos but none near us. Would this be a way to salvage more value from the corn crop? The agent told him how to make a pit silo – 10-12 feet wide, 3-5 feet deep – and long enough to hold the field of corn. Silage with some grain still on the stalks would improve the quality of the corn and make it more palatable. We could cut the corn stalks, load them on wagons, haul them to the silo, and place the corn stalks crosswise in the pit. Drive over the silage as more loads came in this helped pack the silage. Add water if possible to aid in the fermentation process. These things we did and we put the

whole field of corn in the pit. It was not choice feed, but better than a snow bank. It was my job with the help of a teenage neighbor boy to haul water from the nearby creek and dump the water on the silage. We used another wagon with 50 gallon barrels, filled them with buckets at the creek and unloaded them on the silage. This silage effort was labor intensive but it was a big help in saving the cattle herd.

Conditions did improve somewhat in the late 30s due to the build up for WWII. US entered the lend lease program to save Great Britain from the Nazis. We built tanks, airplanes, and other war material for Britain during the period before US entered the war. Many jobs were created during this wartime build up. Otherwise jobs were scarce.

My brother Lynn graduated from Knox College (Galesburg, Il.) in 1939 and got a teaching job in Illinois for \$100 per month. That was \$25 per month more than he could get in Missouri. After teaching one year he saved enough to buy a used car (a 1932 Ford V8) for \$99. That summer he and I drove that car to Kansas and worked in the wheat harvest. We were paid \$4.25 per day plus room and board. After a few weeks in Kansas, we went to Walden, Co. to work on a Hereford cattle and sheep ranch. We were the machinery men and drove the tractors to mow hay 6 days per week for 6 weeks. All other hay hands worked horses. We were paid \$3.00 per day with a bonus if we stayed till the job was finished.

Back home, we always had a family dinner at noon on Sunday. On December 7, 1941, after we finished dinner, we settled in the living room to listen to the news on the radio. Suddenly the announcer broke into the program – Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese. There was much damage to the Naval fleet, damage to the army

installation and the planes there. Over 2,400 killed. We were at war. War was declared the next day.

One of my best friends at the time was Eddie Tighe. He had encouraged me to join the Army Air Corps with him after that school year in 1940. At that time we were under age and needed parents' permission to join, so when I asked my parents about it, mom said, "I don't think that is a good idea." I didn't join but Eddie did. Eddie was killed in the 1st wave of Japanese attack planes at Pearl Harbor.

I graduated from Iberia Junior College in 1940 and went to University of Missouri, Columbia that fall, then joined the Army Air Corps January 1st, 1942. I spent 3 years 9 months there during WWII.

Brother Victor finished Iberia Junior College in 1939 and had trouble getting a job. He went to St. Louis and lived with sister Gretchen while going to Business College. Finishing there he still could not get a job so he joined the Army Air Corps. Having Business College experience was a big help to Victor for he was assigned right away to the headquarters squad. They needed men with that talent. Victor remained in the Army Air Corps throughout WWII and was located at Chanute Field, Rantoul, Il.; Jefferson Barracks, Mo.; and Big Springs, Tx. He did not see foreign service.

Lynn, Victor, and I were all in the Army Air Corps the first 3 years of WWII. In the 4th year of the war, our brother Harold was drafted into the infantry. Then we 4 brothers were in uniform at the same time. Fortunately we all came home safely.

As WWII started brother Lynn and I were eligible for the draft – Lynn, a teacher, was deferred until the end of the school year. In the meantime, he applied to enter the Army Air Corps training program in the field of photography, since he was an amateur

photographer. He took the pictures, processed the film, etc. for the high school yearbook and other activities. But as soon as school was out, he was drafted into the Infantry, because the paperwork from his Air Corps application had yet to be processed. After a few months of Infantry training, the paperwork caught up with him and he was transferred to the Air Corps. Lynn was sent to Harvard University for 6 months of special training, then to China for 2 years where he ran a photo lab.

While he was stationed in north Florida, I spent a month in Miami, before being ordered to Natal, Brazil. Lynn had a weekend pass and took a train to Miami to see me before I left for Brazil. He didn't know until he arrived, that I would be leaving the next morning. His train was late that Saturday night, so we only had time to have breakfast together early the next morning. Then, I left by Pan Am Airways about daylight. It was my first trip in a twin engine DC-3. Three days later, I arrived in Natal, where I remained for almost a year.

While in Natal, in late 1943, the war in Europe was not going well, so an appeal was sent out for more trainees in the pilot, navigator and bombardier programs. Some others in my group and I decided to apply – 2 of us were accepted and were soon shipped back to the States. After processing, I was sent to Springfield College in MA for a semester to review math, physics and English. From there I was shipped to Texas for classification.

The classification officer interviewed us one-on-one. He smiled at me and said, "I see you have qualified for all three – pilot, navigator, bombardier." As I started to speak, he said, "But, we want you to be a navigator." So, I said, "That's fine."

While in Texas I went to aerial gunnery school for B-24s and then navigation training in Houston. After graduation there, I was sent to Dyersburg, TN for crew training in B-17s. This training was completed in July, 1945, soon after the war in Europe ended. Since they didn't use many B-17s in the Pacific, I was selected to go to Alamogordo, NM to train in B-29s. Two weeks before my arrival in NM, the first atomic bomb was tested in the nearby desert. In the interim, 2 atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. Then, on the way to NM, on Aug. 14, 1945 (my 26th birthday), the pilot came on the radio to say that the Japanese were asking for surrender terms. The war was over and I never did see a B-29. Within 30 days I was on my way to Jefferson Barracks, MO for my discharge.

It was during the first year of my military service that I was stationed at the municipal Airport in Nashville, TN. I had a 3-day pass one weekend and took the train to St. Louis to visit sister Gretchen and brother Victor (who was stationed at Jefferson Barracks). A party or get together was held at Gretchen's on Saturday night and it was there I met my future wife, Barbara Jones. Barbara was a junior at Vanderbilt University in Nashville at that time. She would be on the same train with me back to Nashville the next day. We visited on the all day trip to Nashville and I got her phone number and address so we could keep in touch. We did keep in touch throughout the war years via letters, phone calls, and a few visits. We were married shortly after the war ended and were together 62 years, 5 months when she died in April 2008.

Now that I am in my twilight years, I must say I am very grateful for all the good things that have happened to me. I am proud of the challenges I have met. When asked if

I would like to go through these experiences again, my answer is, “No, I might not be so fortunate next time.”

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