

# WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD

by Elizabeth Gibeau

Did you ever wonder how people lived before they had radio and television? I'm sure you did, so now I'm going to tell you. The year I was ten, occasionally we saw a "horseless carriage" on the street here in Carthage. The word "automobile" was not yet a household word. So that means no taxis. People usually walked. If it was a great distance, or if you could afford it, you called a "hack" which was a smaller version of the western stage coach, drawn by a team of carriage horses. If you were going out of town, you took the train. That is, if the train went to the place you were going to. If not, you hired a horse and buggy at the local Livery Stable. Surprisingly, we all lived through that period of inconveniences.

It was a time when kerosene lamps, which replaced candles, were still in use, and were they something to take care of! Filling the lamps and cleaning the chimneys was a daily chore. One day my sister was given a dime and sent to the store for a gallon of kerosene. On the way she lost it and had to go back home for another dime. What a lecture she got on the scarcity of dimes in our household! Few people had telephones. You called on people to deliver messages. Instead of a long-distance phone call, you sent a telegram if you were in a hurry. Otherwise you sent a letter.

It was a time when women wore long hair and very few little girls had short hair. My sister, who was older, never forgave me for beating her to it.

It was a time when women wore ankle-length dresses, some with "mutton-leg" sleeves. These were long sleeves with cuffs up to the elbow, and the top part was puffed way out. It resembled a leg of lamb. Little girls wore skirts to their knees, and drew criticism if they were shorter. Until they were in their late teens, boys wore knickers, short pants which buckled under the knee. For dress wear, their shirts were always white, and for every day they were blue or gray. The men wore pants, not trousers or slacks, usually of heavy material, even in the summer. The exception was overalls, the bib type. They were never called blue jeans nor levis.

Houses were not centrally heated, but with a space-heater in the living room, and the cook-stove in the kitchen heating the back part of the house. Both stoves used either coal or wood. I remember my mother started a fire in the living room stove in the fall and kept it all winter without letting it go out. Very few people could



(JOHN MULLARNEY - friend of the family - taken about 1920)

My earliest recollection of being excited about moving into a new house was when I was about ten years old, when we moved into a big, white double house on Bridge Street. The smaller side was occupied by Uncle Tommy Beahan, my father's brother, Aunt Minnie and their four children; Raymond, Geneva, Lawrence and Margaret. There were really two families on the other side. One was my Uncle Newt's family. He was my mother's brother, and his wife, Aunt Mary, was my father's sister. Their children were Rose and Alton. Our family consisted of my father, John, my mother, Olivia, and their children; Leo, Susie and me, Beth. Really an all in the family situation.

To me the new house was a mansion. The circular staircase in the front hall intrigued me as I had never seen one before. Equally appealing were the huge rooms and the spacious grounds where a ten-year-old had room to run and feel free as a bird. The house we moved from was closed in by other houses and the sidewalk was the only place to play.

Speaking of sidewalks, makes me think of the Fourth of July celebration that year, when the sidewalks of downtown State Street were jammed to capacity. I never saw so many people in my life! Where did they all come from, I wondered. That thought left me quickly as realized my sister and I were just as dressed up as the rest of the people on the street. We were allowed to wear our Sunday best that day, much to the chagrin of Aunt Mary who considered it sort of a desecration to wear our church dresses to celebrate the Fourth of July.

Those were the days before the "Safe and Sane" Fourth was established and we really celebrated! We had fire-crackers, balloons, noisemakers and any conceivable thing the hawkers could sell you. There was a pop-corn stand on the corner of the square and all the ice cream parlors were open. About that time the In thing was a new drink called Moxie, much like today's Coke. You really weren't with it until you had sampled it. It was very good and had more zest than plain lemonade, for instance.

After walking the streets all afternoon, we returned at night for the fire-works. They were held in an open area at the foot of West Street hill, so the hill was covered with people sitting on the ground to watch. The fire-works were fantastic! Much better than we have now since the "Safe and Sane" Fourth came into being. However, much as we enjoyed the day, we were glad to get to bed and dream how much better it might be next year.

And so life went on. I was really an outdoors girl always finding new things to be excited about. One day my mother found me admiring some pretty flowers I had never seen before. They were very tall and had red blossoms all the way up the stalk.

"Oh, Mama, I'm so glad we moved here," I exclaimed. "Have you seen these pretty red flowers? I never saw flowers growing up the stalk like that. Do you know the name of them?"

"They are Hollyhocks. And this area is the orchard, because there are fruit trees here. But why anyone would sow Hollyhocks in an orchard is beyond me. But maybe the seeds were just blown here by the wind. Why are you so glad about this place?"

"Because it is so big! So much room to run in. Even in the house there is more room. And the apple trees! Do you know, Mama, there are some white apples on that tree ripe enough to eat?"

"Are they now. They must be Yellow Transparents. These two look like Dutchess, and I hope the other two are winter apples."

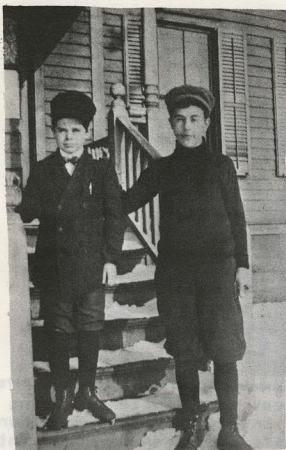


do that as it took regular tending. Then the ashes had to be taken out every day. In those days it took much more time and energy to keep the house warm than the modern method of turning up the thermostat. The heat from the stovepipes was the only heat in the upstairs room.

There was very little indoor plumbing in those days and you were lucky if you had the cold water piped into the kitchen. Usually it was carried in from outside pumps, and the water used for washing and for dishes was thrown out on the ground, but away from the house.

But enough of that! I promised you a story and a story you shall have.





(NELSON AND ELVIN JONAS - cousins - taken about 1912)

"You mean we'll have apples to eat all winter?"

"Yes, if we store them properly. Now I'd better get back to the house and help Aunt Mary with the supper."

Walking back to the house Mama held up her long skirts because the grass was so tall.

"My! Your father had better get out the scythe and cut this grass for the horses," she remarked.

There were no power mowers in those days. In small places a scythe was used, and in the meadows a horse-drawn mowing machine cut the hay much faster. The modern power tools surely save time and labor.

In August it was decided we should go huckle-berrying. The berries were on Pine Plains, which is now Fort Drum, a large military establishment. Papa put a lot of straw in the bottom of the big wagon and we all climbed in, complete with our berry pails and a bountiful lunch. We sang and laughed the whole six miles. It's a wonder we didn't scare the horses. We wore broad-brimmed hats to protect us from the sun and long sleeves to guard against sunburn and insects. We finally got to the berry patch and picked for some time before we ate lunch. The only thing I remember about that was the cold tea Aunt Mary brought. She put sugar and milk in it, and since I don't like milk, I couldn't stand the smell of it. Curious how something like that will be remembered so many years. After lunch we finished filling our containers and felt it was a worthwhile trip. Every one was very tired and we were glad to get home. The berries were put on the cellar floor as we had no refrigerator. The next day was spent looking over the berries and canning them. Much work, but we enjoyed them in the winter.

That fall my father and his two brothers, Tommy and Barty, took a lumber job way up above Wanakena, as there was no work on the road in the winter. The man lived in an abandoned caboose (the trainmen's Pullman) which was on a side track, and they did their own work, cooking and all. The railroad went way up in the woods to bring out the logs that had been cut.

Sometime in January, I believe, my father came home. It was nearing the deadline for the job to be completed and he was afraid they might not make it unless Mama went up and cooked for them so the men could put in longer hours on the job.

After quite some discussion, Mama agreed to go but insisted that Susie and I go too. Leo was old enough to stay with Aunt Mary and Uncle Newt as he wouldn't be so much of a care for them. We went on the train to Benson Mines and by horse-drawn sleigh the rest of the way. It was an all day's journey.

Can you picture what it would be like living in a caboose way up in the wilds? Was it ever cold in that car! And there was so much snow we couldn't play outdoors, so we drew pictures, read stories and studied our school books which we had brought with us. Mama was very good at suggesting things to keep us occupied. It was almost like modern supervised recreation.

The cold didn't let up. In fact it was so cold that there was ice on the wall back of the beds! But we stuck it out for three weeks until the job was finished, Mama was glad because she was afraid Susie would get pneumonia again. She had been very sick with it two years before.

The day we came home was something to remember! We had to start very early in the morning while it was still dark, because we had to drive a long ways down the railroad track before we could turn off onto a road. We had to get off the track before the morning train came up. It was a very cold day so Papa put a lot of straw in the bottom of the sleigh and laid a blanket over it. Then he had us lie down and covered us with more blankets. He stood up and drove the team. What a difference from riding in a heated car on paved roads!

We finally got off the railroad track and drove for quite a time before we stopped at a lumber camp occupied by some French people. The minute we got in the door, we were taken over to the stove to get warm. One of the older girls brought each of us a glass of liquor to warm us up. Before Mama noticed, I had downed the whole thing. I think she gasped when she saw it. Of course, these French people were used to alcoholic beverages, but we weren't.

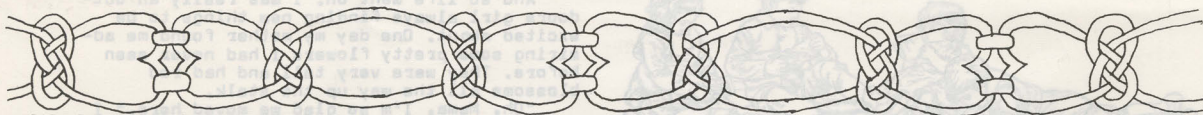
Soon we were loaded onto the sleigh again as we had to get to Benson Mines to get the train to Carthage. They had a great time making me up when we got to the station, and for years I got drunk at the tender age of ten. Mama, Susie and I got on the train but Papa had to drive the team home, about thirty-six miles.

When we got to Carthage we had to walk the mile home and it was bitter cold. Mama froze the side of her face. Were we ever glad to get into a warm house where there was room to turn around in and no ice back of the bed. It must have been the next day when Papa got home, but I don't remember.

After reading this account of the "Good Old Days" count your blessings. You have central heating to keep you warm anywhere in the house, indoor plumbing for sanitation and convenience, and electricity for lighting and appliances, among other things.

And happily you will have a few things left over from those "good old days", such as faith in God and your fellowmen, diligence, reliability, honesty and stamina to keep at a job until it is finished. These things can't be bought with money but are far more important in the long run.

The year I was ten brought many new experiences for me, but I guess the greatest was the appreciation of a good warm house -- without ice back of the bed.



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