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"THE WAY IT WAS"

When a man is coasting along through the eighties of his lifetime and looking ninety squarely in the face, he deserves recalling and trying to record nostalgic memories of THE WAY IT WAS in earlier years of this twentieth century. That is what I propose to do tonight

This century was only five weeks short of three years old when I came into it and four months older when my parents returned with me to Hopkinsville, which has been my permanent and official residence ever since.

As a child I was grieved not to have a pony or a horse and buggy at home for family conveyance. In fact, not even a tricycle! I have to remind myself that my father, who was thirty years my senior, grew up in a machine age. Bicycles or trains provided transportation and motor cars or automobiles after about 1908. My first experience with the new vehicle must have been in 1908 when Dr. F.M. Brown, Sr. came in his car, a big-wheel, small-tired motor car made by International Harvester Company, to take the Yost Family for a spin. Part of the back seat hinged and swung down to the rear providing steps to enter the car. Such motor cars were for personal or family transportation or for professional use by doctors who were delighted to be free from the chores attendant upon owning and using a horse and buggy.

Children walked to school; adults, with a few exceptions, walked to work or to church. To travel any distance, train service was the common mode of travel. When I was too little to climb in or out of a train passenger car, my father would take my mother, sister, and me to Princeton, Ky. and put us into a train car that went directly to Louisville where we visited my grandmother and aunt. This trip was on the I.C.R.R. The same trip to Louisville could be made by boarding an L & N train at Hopkinsville and changing to other trains at Guthrie and Bowling Green. When I was big enough

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to get in and out of train cars we always used the L & N train, boarding at the Ninth Street Station here and finishing at the old Tenth Street Station in Louisville.

In Hopkinsville, there was no other daily event that could equal the arrivals and departure of passenger trains pulled by steam engines. When the train was headed north, its steam locomotive would almost always stop close to the Ninth Street crossing. If it was a big through train like the DIXIE FLYER, it had cars for mail, baggage, and express, followed by passenger cars, a diner, and several sleeping cars. At the very end was an observation or parlor car. While waiting for mail bags, baggage, and express items as well as passengers to be gotten on and off the train, the boiler of the steam engine would breathe gently, or pant and puff vigorously to develop the required pressure to start the train on its journey with its rhythmic choo-choo sounds and whistles for street or road crossings.

At most train arrivals, especially the big ones with sleeper cars, there would be representatives from local hotels or boarding houses calling out their offers for service to handle bags and passengers to one of these establishments. The names of Hotel Latham and Hill House, and the melodious voices that announced them could be heard above the noises of passengers, visitors, and station employees. The memory of such sights and sounds are vivid today. One special visitor to all trains with Pullman cars and a diner would be Will E. Campbell, local pipe maker. Porters in the sleeping cars would save newspapers or other discarded reading material. Dining car chefs seemed to hand out bags of food and receive in return some of Will Campbell's hickory pipes. For those who wanted or could afford such service, there was a hack or cab whose driver, Uncle Bill Evans, was always elegantly attired in frock coat and high top hat with a fine pair of horses harnessed to his rig.

When diesel engines began to pull freight and passenger trains there was a happy reduction of smoke and soot in the air, but an unhappy loss of the glamour and excitement the arrival of big trains brought to a small town like Hopkinsville.

Living in this area was simple, even crude with such services and necessities as clean, pure water, electricity, sewer system and natural gas being almost unknown or inadequately supplied. Cooking was done on a stove whose fuel was usually coal, but could be wood. Food, milk, and other perishable items could be kept in an ice box, with ice available every day from an ice man.

In Louisville, Ky., in November 1902, I was born at my grandmother's house on Oak Street between First and Second Streets. There was an electric trolley and electric street lights on Oak Street. My grandmother's house had gas lights, city water that could be heated by the kitchen cook stove, and an indoor flush toilet. It was a three-story house with coal grates or gas burners in the fireplaces. I visited my grandmother and aunt regularly from 1906 to about 1920.

Back in Hopkinsville in March 1903, at the old residence of my Yost grandfather, there were none of these city conveniences. A side yard hydrant offered city water that was used only for washing and cooking. Drinking water came from a cistern, an almost universal household appendage at that time. My wife remembers such a cistern at the Methodist Parsonage on Campbell at Eleventh Street and much later, on East Seventh at what had been the Monroe Dalton home where the cistern had the unique character of being above ground and having its head or water lifting apparatus inside a roof covered and latticed back porch.

When my parents built a new home on East Seventh where a Thompson home had burned very recently, there were the underground remains of the Thompson cistern located and equipped to let the early part of a heavy rain flush clean the roof

and gutters before flipping a valve to let the good rain water flow into the cistern. At our new family home no time was lost in having the old cistern destroyed or demolished and filled so that it held no water and no longer constituted a hazard of accidental drowning to family or visiting children who would play around it.

Porches were almost universal, both front and back and whenever weather permitted family and friends gathered on porches or lawn.

In Louisville, the front door had no more than a small stoop and steps leading to a sidewalk, where the adults sat while children ran along the paved sidewalk, marvelling at how cool we felt while running and how hot when called to sit down.

At our old home here we had a wooden yard swing and a mesh hammock. --- Ways to avoid the hot, stuffy indoors!

Transportation was by walking or with a horse-drawn vehicle. Most people stayed home. Neighbors and family dropped in. Doctors came when called and church pastors were seen at church services and when visiting in members' homes.

Much to my sorrow and chagrin, Hopkinsville never had a trolley car. In Louisville, they ran everywhere, including so-called inter-urban lines to nearby suburban communities or villages, and across the Ohio to Indiana neighbors. From my grandmother's home on Oak Street, the sounds of bells and of wheels on rails could be heard all day and almost all night as cars approached the crossing at Oak and Second Streets and then the sounds receded into the distance. Trolleys made stops just one-half block away from West Oak Street. At the end of the line you paid to make a return trip, otherwise you could get a free transfer to use where two lines crossed each other.

By 1914 Louisville streets were becoming filled with sight and sound of automobiles, particularly on Third St.

which had no electric trolley, and autos, many which were electric, were now replacing fine carriages.

In fact it was at this time that my father had a car in which he took my sister, our mother, and me, and usually a friend (child or adult) to Louisville, making one overnight stop along the way. Through the years of these trips, stops were at such places as Glasgow Junction, Hardyville, New Haven, and Bardstown. In these towns there were what were then called hotels or inns. Talbott Inn at Bardstown is still open and active today. Glasgow Junction offered hospitality in the form of straw-stuffed mattresses, which made it a joy to be up at daylight. Breakfast was always bacon or ham, eggs, biscuits, and a hot coffee, very black and bitter that could have given satisfaction only to pure coffee addicts.

The recent dedication of a new stadium for sports events and some classes and other purposes has recalled the origins of the old HHS School and grounds and the concrete WPA Stadium built about 1936.

My first five years of schooling were at Clay Street School which had four grades each on the first and second floors and high school and a student assembly room on the third floor. I remember vividly the last such student assembly. It was a balmy, spring day with all windows open to admit the delicious smells and sights of springtime, with its promise of summer vacation. We sang together and a few students and perhaps teachers made up a program. One small boy led an equally small dog onto the stage and recited in a sing-song voice a ditty or tune that must have been popular at the time. It was something like this:

"It makes no difference if he is just a hound,
You've got to quit kicking my dog around!"

The school building faced West and its grounds backed up to the RR tracks. To the North was the boys playground and opposite it to the South was the girls playground.

Among the boys was one who at the time used two crutches. He was able to stand and pivot on one, while swinging the other viciously around himself. By this maneuver and a commanding voice, he became master of the playground.

The day when the circus came to town was the biggest event of the year. The No. 1 circus companies were Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's. The military organization that gave us success in the recent desert sand, Persian Gulf Affair could not have been more precise and efficient than the one that could set up circus for one day stands. Human actors and performers, animals, (tame, domesticated, and wild) but trained -- from elephants to tiny monkeys. The whole crew had to be show-people. How they would unload the circus from the special rail cars; erect the big tent and be ready for a parade with half the kids from town watching, was always a mystery! Every animal and every human and some machines had some act to perform to keep the great crowd entertained; but circuses could not attract and seat as many people as special event local football games, where recent attendance was at or above 5,000.

This was the time of the Model 'T' Ford and of renewed emphasis on good roads. These good times were upset by the flu epidemic of 1917 - World War I. - and then the 1929 Crash and Depression of the thirties.

Before the shock and tragedy of WW I, culminating with the Flu Epidemic of 1917 - 1918, schools and movie houses closed - hundreds of deaths. This was followed by a great exodus to Florida; a great Hurricane of 1918 and a bursting of the Florida Bubble. Then the inflationary period before 1929, and the depression years, with a very popular song like this:

"The high cost of living is only a joke,
but the high cost of loving is keeping me broke:

I borrow from Mother, from sister and brother
to try to keep up with the style,
Every bricklayer's daughter, drinks wine just
like water, so-----
I'll have to stop loving a while."

This was the Flapper Period of the twenties, when young women flaunted their disdain for conventional dress and conduct.

Small town or rural lives seemed to go along simply, but with some degree of comfort and security. Every kitchen had a cook stove. The pantry had homemade jams and jellies, a can of lard and a barrel with flour, some smoked bacon, and occasionally a ham, and a hen house that supplied eggs and an occasional roasted hen. Other staples were two kinds of potatoes, cornmeal, rice, dried beans, onions, sugar, molasses, milk, butter, and cheese. It was common practice to feed at a kitchen table or on a back porch, any hungry wanderer, origins and destinations unknown. There have always been stories of how such kind hospitality was given to a "tramp" who became a successful gold prospector in Colorado or California and later left a substantial fortune to his kind Hopkinsville benefactor.

Many a good housewife would say that she never let a man leave her kitchen door hungry!

Home deliveries were an essential part of every day home family life. Ice was delivered every day except Sunday. Hardware and dry goods clothing stores had delivery service. There were numerous neighborhood stores to which people could and did walk, or send their children on non-school days or after school.

Store bought fruit and vegetables were always supplemented by a home garden and orchard. Some people had a family milk cow, or that of a neighbor who had surplus milk, buttermilk, or butter to sell. Life was made very convenient and the absence of a car ready for instant use was no handicap.

Home heating was by burning of coal in stove, furnace, or a fireplace and the coal was delivered in a quantity to last through the winter heating season; and for the year round use of a coal burning cook stove located in the kitchen.

There was no supply of natural gas for Hopkinsville and an inadequate system of gas lines to distribute the artificially generated gas for those who could afford it. Electricity was supplied by the Ky. - Tenn. Light & Power Company which for many years, generated electricity in Clarksville only, but had transmission lines to bring it here. It was a proud and happy day when a steam powered generating plant began its operation on the banks of our Little River, beside the L & N tracks and near our cemetery. Even better was the time when TVA service and lower costs were available. An adequate system to distribute clean water, and an underground network of sewers had to be in place before indoor plumbing fixtures could replace the back yard privy or the water basket and wash pan on the side porch shelf. The services that could, had in large cities like Louisville, come more gradually here.

Not many can recall as I do, the tinkling bells and then the donkey or mule-drawn contraption with flaps and patriotic bunting which identified the man whose official trade was to clean out and haul away the natural contents of a privy. This Public Servant amused the neighborhood children because of the sights and sounds of the equipment of his trade and the conveyance that took him about his job. To the grown-ups- he was a Man of Distinction!

There was, however, a brief period when banks were closed by edict, Bank Holiday, or by failures. Boxes of paper money and coins were shipped by express to pay for flour shipments. Our own company had that very experience.

We had Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal to end the Depression, but actually it took World War II to do the job.

Both of our World Wars - the first against Kaiser Bi-1, the second against Adolph Hitler and the Nazis, brought shortages and rationing. During World War I, we had designated "do without days"

Heat - less Sundays
Meat - less Mondays
Wheat - less Tuesdays
Sweet - less Wednesdays
Gas - less Thursdays

During World War II we had coupons for gasoline and could not buy a new automobile or home, nor a major home appliance such as an electric stove or refrigerator. I remember saving up enough gasoline tickets or coupons to take my family along on a business trip to Birmingham, Alabama, but when getting a refill in Decatur, the station operator said to forget the gas coupons, because rationing was over.

When my parents built a new home to which we moved in 1908, we had all modern conveniences, central heating by coal burning furnaces, plumbing, indoor toilets, hot water, a tub with shower and shampoo, and sitz tub, an extra com- mode in the basement, and toilet and wash basin accessible from the back porch. (Luxury equal to Oak Street in Louisville.) It was thought, however, that it would injure one's eyes to read or study by an electric light so we kept a good old kerosene student lamp, around which the family gathered at night for school homework, games, and reading out loud. One person usually read aloud while others sat and listened. The most serious reading was done by daylight.

My father paid \$1,000.00 for a lot and \$6,000.00 to build a home and was in debt for it most of his life. My parents' home, when paid out, would become collateral for a new loan to buy Milling Company Stock.