

GROWING UP DIFFERENT

It might be said that I grew up the same as everyone else did, not different, but in order to put that theory into perspective one must take into account the times.

My life began in 1923. The audience hearing this story would likely have been born around 1970, give or take a couple of years, therefore it stands to reason our growing up would be different.

I was born in the Eastern Townships of Quebec on a farm of approximately 160 acres. Both my father and mother immigrated to Canada from England but married here. My father was sent to this country with a group of children known as the "home boys". He managed to overcome that humble beginning and buy himself a farm. My mother had a son named Albert born in England before she knew my father and the family they had together consisted of 2 girls and 3 boys. I was the eldest of that family. I had a brother 2 years younger than I and a sister 5 years my junior. The last two boys came along later and were youngsters in school when I was already fairly grown up.

My father had a Dairy farm and most of the time the herd consisted of a bull and about 17 cows. Each year the cows were bred and the bull calves were sold and the heifers were kept to keep our dairy herd going. What made our situation different than most was that my sister and I did most of the farming while my brother Charlie did the cooking and worked in the house. My career as a milker actually began when I was five years old. It was a joke with our farm neighbours as the later children were born that my father had a milking stool ready for the newest child. That, of-course, was not true.

When I was six years old I was sent to school. It was a distance of over three miles from our farm and consisted of one room. About 17 of us were taught at all different grade levels by the same teacher. As young children we walked to school and as we got old enough we used a horse to get us there. We went by buggy in the decent weather and a bob sled in the cold and snowy Quebec winters. I loved to go to school but because of the amount of work to be done on the farm it was necessary sometimes to have to miss. At those times I cried. My father considered me his best milker, which indeed I was, and I milked most of the cows myself by 7:00 o'clock in the morning before breakfast, and again as soon as I arrived home from school late in the afternoon. The chores each day included cleaning out the stalls and then

spreading the manure out in the fields. If it was winter, it was spread on top of the snow to be absorbed by the ploughed soil when the thaw came in the Spring.

By the time I was 13, I had completed Grade 6 and my father was then a sick man. Out of necessity I quit school and stayed home to basically run the farm. My mother, who never seemed to be well enough to do any work on the farm, left my father when I was about 18 and taking Albert with her, she took a job in Montreal. I looked after my father when he was so ill and was with him when he died. My mother returned to the farm when my father died.

When my mother returned, I accepted work in the area keeping house for others. I did this for about one year and then on V.J. Day in 1945, I moved to Southern Ontario. About one more year after that I married a man who had been a neighbour in Quebec and had served in the Army in Europe during World War II.

As might be expected, Fred was a farmer and I carried on my life as a farmer. If Fred and I had our choice in the job we would perform, I chose hoeing the garden and Fred chose cooking a meal or doing some household chores. It worked out very well for both of us. We had three sons, and I might say we managed to give our boys quite a different life than I had known. We provided them with most everything we were able to and all three boys received an education. They are three successful men today and have families of their own. Fred died ten years ago and I now live alone.

Do I resent my life as a farm girl in the Dirty Thirties? Not really! For the most part it was not that different from that of our neighbours. Times were very tough everywhere during those years. There is one thing I never did completely get over, however. The relationship between my father and mother was not really a good one. It seemed racked with arguments and unrest. A lot of it stemmed around my half brother whom my mother managed to use to gain her own ends. Time, of-course, has healed a great deal of that hurt and I've put that part pretty well behind me. I have accepted that my upbringing was my lot in life and I have lived a great many years since those days without too many regrets. Growing up different does not necessarily need to make our adult and golden years any less enjoyable than those who had or have it easier.