

Paul Miller, 90 years

I think I have lived the 90 year period that has seen the most progress of any such periods passed or to come.

I had somewhere a picture of me at about 6 month's old sitting on the hood of my father's first car – a black model T Ford. All Ford cars were black and sold new for four hundred and some dollars. You had to wear heavy clothing if it was chilly out.

When I was about age 4 or 5 and my brother Glenn was 16 or 17, we both had pneumonia at the same time. Dr. Gladstone drove a horse and buggy 8 miles from Walton to our Mundale home in the morning and again in the evening to doctor us. Pneumonia was often fatal back then.

At about 5 ½, I started school at Stoodly Hollow district school, Town of Hamden. (The school house now is someone's vacation home.) It was about a 1.2 mile walk each end of the day for about 8 years. Our district's school had no running water and had a little wood stove like Mike and Becky have in their dining room. Usually some boy in the 7th or 8th grade would go an hour early and build a fire.

I remember in February 1934 Dad and 3 Mundale farmers went to Syracuse to a Dairymen's League meeting. They had my Uncle's brand new 1934 Ford with no heater in it. When they got to the meeting it was 50 below 0 there. The same day I was on early duty to walk the 1.2 miles to Stoodly Hollow and build the fire. It was 40 below here.

My dad farmed it with horses and hand-milked the cows with the help of mother of course. Mother could milk faster. One day, when I was about 17, my Father and mother were away and I was left drawing rocks from a field we were about to plant with a team of horse and a two wheeled dump cart. There was about a 12 foot embankment on the lower side of the road where we dumped them over. I backed the cart to the edge and pulled the dump-lever but I forgot to unhook the tail gate. The rock's slid back with such force hitting the tail gate that it went down the embankment taking the horses with it. The horses lay in a swampy area, harnesses wrapped every which way around them, one horse laid with its' head underneath it. Finally after many frightened minutes I freed the horses' head and began unhooking harness straps so they could get on their feet. I had never been so frightened in all my life.

Sometime in the early 1930's my mother entered a home beautification contest sponsored by Delaware County Cooperative Extension office. She won 1st prize. I forgot how much it was but I know with the money she bought our first flush toilet. I think I was about 12 or 13 years old. Dad dug an 8ft square cesspool with pick and shovel. We had no electricity so we had no running hot water for a bath tub.

Stepping back, I remember our first radio was one that my brother made in shop class. It had ear phones, so we would turn one inside out and sit with our heads together to listen. One of the radio shows I remember was Fibber Magee and Molly. It was about a couple and it was funny.

In 1934, I started going to high school in Walton, for which my parents had to pay tuition. The High School – on Townsend Street had no gym but we played Basketball on the 3rd floor on dusty rough floor boards. It had no athletic field so they played football on a big lawn over at the Silk Mill- at the end of Williams Street. Look at the beautiful athletic fields and the shiney gym floor we have to day – no wonder our school taxes are a hundred times higher.

There were no school busses then. So I had to board in town from Sunday night til Friday afternoon until I became 16 and got a drivers license. Then Dad bought me a second hand 1928 Whippet car for about \$25 I believe. It had a cloth top with a rumble set in the trunk part. It was the forerunner of the Willys Jeep for World War II. Old car companies shut down for WWII and made war machines. The rumble seat didn't last long. Dad cut it out and built a wooden box so I could draw feed home from the feed mill. Permanent antifreeze wasn't made yet, so in the winter when I got to school I had to let the water out of the radiator and then put some back in to go home. *Sidenote*

In 1937, my Dad took a petition to all the farms on East Brook to get New York Electric to run a line to us. He had to have so many signers per mile. He just made it to our farm. 1938 the line was built. The first appliances were milk cooler for the Barn so we wouldn't have to cut and store ice for the summer. We had an ice pond and every year in January we'd mark 2 ft strips of the ice and cut it into blocks, pull it out, we had a wooden shoot, a man would stand on each side, one guy at the top pulling, load em on a sleigh, take em to the barn, pack em in sawdust and then in July and August we'd use it in our milk vat as well as our icehouse. If the milk got to the creamery too warm, they wouldn't accept it, you'd have to bring it back home and make butter with it. Next was an Electric water heater and a 2nd hand bath tub.

Dad bought his first tractor after I left home in about 1949.

I apologize for the order in which these incidences pop into my head, but around 1929 the board of health ordered all cattle to be tested for TB. And reactors were to be sold to what ever agency it was. There were 25 or more dairy farmers on East Brook. All of which had five or more reactors. There were no cattle trucks then, so we drove them to the railroad stock yards on West end, Walton. We probably had 100 head or more by the time we reached the last farm. Us kids job was to run ahead and keep them from taking a side street. Can you imagine driving 100 loose cattle through Walton streets today?

I remember the Depression of the late 30's and early 40s. Dad couldn't pay the interest on his mortgage for 3 or 4 years. They were scared they were going to lose the farm. They traded eggs, beef, pork, dressed chickens, sweet corn, potatoes, and fire wood for flour, sugar and other staples that we didn't have. You couldn't do that today. We never went hungry. Mother had racks of canned goods in the cellar that would feed an army. They talk about today's *recession*, but look at the cars we drive, the television, cell phones, automatic washers and dryers and automatic heat.

George Tacey, Bernice Lyons' father, was a farmer on West Brook. He held the mortgage on Dad's farm and quite a few other farms around, and I can remember him comin to Dad, Dad was almost crying, afraid he was gonna lose the farm.... Mr. Tacey said "Floyd hang on, I know you're good for it – things are gonna get better." I remember was old enough to feel what Dad was feeling.

During my last years of high school, Hitler was killing masses of people in Germany and we were sucked into World War II. Many of my friends or acquaintances joined or were drafted in the army. I was seriously ill in 1943. there were no ambulances so I was taked to Fox Hospital by tow Walton Morticians in Lyon Brothers Hearse. That was when I was drafted and failed the test. Ten who I knew well didn't come back: Charles Seager, George Allen, Otto Bowker, James Duigan, Bob Estus, Charles Perez, Fred Lambert, William Neal, Jim Burrus, Robert Boyer.

When Kate and I were married in 1946, Dad and I had built a garage with living quarters overhead on the home farm in Mundale. We lived there about 3 years but we both worked in town, so it didn't work very well. She worked at Crawford Feed Milling Office and I had a job driving a fuel oil truck for GLF. Our hours were so different; she was always waiting for me somewhere. We could only afford 1 car, so we then bought a house on Bruce Street in Walton and fixed an apartment to rent out in the upstairs.

Then a little run-down farm of 30 acres came up for sale on Mt. Pleasant. We bought it and the purchase included a team of horses, 1 cow, 1 yearling and a calf, 200 hens and 2000 rats. I bought rat poison by the 5 lb. bag for a month and got rid of them. We sold the horses and cattle right away and the hens 10 at a time. We had an auction and sold all of the furniture that was left in the house except a TV. Only a few people in Walton had TV's. There was no cable- and few places could get a signal. We moved the TV to Bruce Street and all our friends came to watch the lousy picture. We rented out the house to a family who worked on the construction of the Pepacton Reservoir.

A year later, we sold the Bruce Street house and moved into our new old, old house on Mt. Pleasant. We had much cleaning and fixing to do. Then after a couple of years we advertised it and it sold right away. It was about January 1st, 1956 and we promised to be out by April 1st. On Friday the 13th of January 1956, Floyd Slauson pulled in with a bulldozer and started digging the cellar and a ditch to the spring for our new house next door. Within a week I had the footer forms in and poured full f concrete. Buck Kilpatrick, Kate's brother, trucked in the concrete blocks, then came the slow part. I laid them by myself. When done my brother Glenn and his whole crew of carpenters moved in and framed, sheathed and had felt paper on the roof in about a week. I poured enough concrete floor in the cellar to set up the heating system. Bu this time, winter was feeling real cold and I was happy to see Valentine Heating move in copper piping and a gas furnace. We had to jack hammer frozen ground to the street to get the gas line in; otherwise the weather was good to us. Kate wasn't as much help as she usually was because our twins, Betsy and Becky, were born March 1st.

I have never regretted the moves we made.

Holidays and Hobbies as a Kid:

I'm not sure if it was Memorial Day or Labor Day, but Dad liked to go for a ride to Mt. Utsayantha, the highest point in Delaware County. The car we had was a 1924 Buick, and instead of a fuel pump it had a vacuum pump that supplied the motor with gasoline, it worked good on the level but not on hill climbs, so we'd get half way up the mountain and the car would quit so we'd have to turn around and back up. /there was a fire tower, we'd have a picnic and look at all of Delaware County and clear across the Hudson.

Another ride we did maybe once a year was the Rip Van Winkle trail, it was cut right into the side of the mountain, and you could look right down hundreds of feet.

Family reunions were real popular, we'd go to 3 or 4 every year, with 45 or 50 people there – it was the only time of the year you saw them. They'd switch and have them in somebody else's door yard every summer. Every August 21st was the Mundale church picnic – unless it come on a Sunday, I don't think they'd ever have one on a Sunday. We played ball in the flat across from the church.

We fished, my Mother liked to fish. The summer I was sick, she'd go down and catch 3 or 4 trout for me to eat. (I had lost a terrible amount of weight, 160 lbs. down to 80 or 90.)

Hunting and Trapping – I trapped quite a bit for muskrats, mink and skunk and sold the furs – we'd get \$3 or \$4 for a skunk back then and that was quite a bit of money. It was messy skinning – wasn't too bad if you did it right. I bought my first gun for \$6 when I was 16 in Dutcher's store on Delaware St and I'd hunt for partridge, gray squirrels and rabbits and Mother would cook them for dinner. I was 16 before I saw my first deer, the Conservation Department brought them in. I was in my 20's before I hunted deer - we used to go to Shavertown to hunt deer as they had a lot more over there.

As a kid in the country, our summer vacations gave us time to spend with cousins. I had cousins in Syracuse that would come and spend time on the farm with us. When asked what we did – the first thing I remembered was catching bumblebees in the holly hocks and chasing each other with them. We'd go swimming over in the brook, they'd help me with my chores – gathering eggs and barn work.

I also had a cousin in Delhi that I would stay with. He had a paper route. One time Franklin D. Roosevelt was speaking at the courthouse square and that night we delivered papers to the place where he stayed. FDR came to the door in his wheelchair and shook hands with my cousin Harland and I. I'll never forget that.

Gathering sap and making syrup was always one of the favorite times of year, after a long winter, doing something different, My brother Glenn would often boil all night long. We had a saphouse right near the brook. Opening day of trout season a lot of fisherman would stop in the saphouse.