

I was born on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1931 in Magee Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA. I would always have had my birthday on the 26th, but FDR, who was elected president in 1932 and replaced the president of my birthday, Herbert Hoover, in 1933, later changed the date from the 26th to the last Thursday in the month. Bummer. Those of you older folks with a knowledge of history, (the youngsters may not because history and civics aren't taught in public schools anymore.....consider all the young supporters of Bernie)....., will figure out that I spent my first 10 years or so growing up during a national depression. The stock market crashed in October 1929, and by 1931 the depression was in full swing and stayed that way until World War Two, which we entered after Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941. On that date I was 10 years and eleven days old, so my memories of the Great Depression were mostly all from the four or five years before Pearl Harbor. A very interesting read about those years from 1929 to 1941 is *The Forgotten Man* by Amity Shales. (Great author, I am reading her bio of Calvin Coolidge right now).

This Beacon story will recount what it was like to grow up in a poor family during hard times, when about 25% of the workforce in the US was unemployed during the depression that effected all the other nations worldwide as well.

My difficult breech birth meant an extended stay in the hospital for me and my Mom. In those days the babies in the nursery were identified by wearing a string of beads spelling their names on their wrists. I was so cut up from a forceps delivery that I didn't need one. After release from Magee, we lived for a number of years in the home of my maternal grandmother, at 918 Rothpletz Street, in north side Pittsburgh. (I visited the house in 1992; it is still there and can be seen on Google Maps).

Rothpletz Street is terraced, built on a very steep hill, with houses only on one side of the street with the rear of the houses cut into the hill. In the front of the houses (after crossing the road), you could look down and only see the roofs of the houses on the street far below. Our back yard was a small concrete pad with a ten or so foot high concrete wall holding up the hill. We didn't have neighbors behind us because our "back yard" was Riverview Park, one of the largest parks in Pittsburgh. So to go to the park, all we had to do was climb a very tall wooden staircase leaning against the concrete wall, and on reaching the top a few short steps took you into the park. I did that many times during visits in later years.

(Grandma lived there till her passing in 1952).

What was life like during those Great Depression years? Here are some things I remember or learned during later visits.

We used streetcars for transport because we never had a car. We didn't have a water heater or a bathroom. We cooked and heated the house with a stove in the kitchen, which had only a cold water tap, so we had to heat water for our Saturday night baths, which were done in a galvanized tub set up in the kitchen. Houses were built with a toilet in a corner of the cellar. We didn't have a refrigerator, we but had a wooden ice box on the back porch just outside the kitchen. Once a week the iceman came by in a horse drawn wagon to leave ice. A sign was put in a front window that had the numbers 25, 50, 75 and 100 on it. Whichever number was at the top was the size of the ice cube the iceman left in the wooden box. For years afterward we always called our frig an "ice box".

In later years we finally got a telephone with a two party line.....you shared the three digit number with another house. To use the phone you picked up the receiver and listened to learn if another person was using the line. If so you hung up and tried again later when the line was free. When you got a free line an operator would ask you what number you wanted dialed, you'd give her (it was always a female) the number and she would dial it for you. We now are using phones with private numbers that we can tote around whoever we go. We've come a long way, baby.

Those were tough years, but happy ones. Considering the times and how people were worse off than we were, our family life was a good one. We didn't have much but I can't remember ever going hungry. Being very poor can be a fine learning experience which makes you truly appreciate the better years you eventually live. I wouldn't trade the wonderful parents I had for all the tea in Ceylon. Oops, I mean Sri Lanka.

Blessing to all,

Dick