 Olney Memories # 127

 August 30, 2016

Hi Everyone,

Here we are approaching the fall season again. Sitting here typing this, all at once the words to our Olney Tigers Fight Song started flowing through my head. I wonder how many of you can remember all the words to that song? I “think” I can recall them all…  Those of you who played football and those who sat in the bleachers so many years watching our boys play the games listened to that song year after year have lots of good memories. And last and not least those of us who played in the Marching Band under Gus and Mary’s direction I still can hear Gus call out during those endless marching rehearsals, day and night…”Weesner, get in that line!!”. Gus wanted *straight lines* even in rehearsals, imagine that! Ha Maybe some of you have some fond memories of our High School football season. Send them to the Olney Memories!

Below is a list of names that I need the correct e-mail addresses for. If any of you can help me with this, I certainly would appreciate this. Thank you kindly.

Ann Weesner King

Pianoann97@aol.com

Class of 1960

1. Bill Bay
2. Bonnie Craig
3. Ken & Janet Gibson Gower
4. James Paul Fish
5. Cindy Kibbs Combs
6. Cheryl Farrar
7. Kay Dowden
8. Brad Martin
9. La Donna Cook Jourdan
10. Vicki Slunaker Merritt

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 Jerry Scherer

jerrycars@aol.com

 66th REUNION of ERHS CLASS of 1950

# This is just a reminder that we are planning the 66th reunion of the graduating class of 1950 from OTHS (ERHS). Almost all of us have retired from our lifetime jobs and have had many experiences that we can talk to others about and can ask them about their experiences.

# To do something a little different We thought we might ask some of our friends from other ERHS classes. Therefore we would like to invite those from the classes of 1949, l951 and l952 to join us at our reunion at the Old Time Steakhouse on Friday, September 23rd We would ask that they also call or e-mail as listed below for reservations

We are planning to have it in the same place we have had it for the last several years Old Time Steakhouse in Olney. **The date is Friday September 23 RD** which is the Friday before the Fall Festival at the Olney Park.

You are asked to phone Olde Tyme Steakhaus

(618-392-3663 or e-mail

oldetymesteakhause@gmail.com.) to make dinner

Reservations for the “class of 1950” room. We will

Order from the menu and they ask for reservations

To be made 2 weeks prior to the meeting if possible

 There will be a social at around 4:30 p.m. or so.

We will have dinner around 6:00 p.m.

This invitation will be sent via e-mail, TAC, OLNEY

MEMORIES and word of mouth. So please pass

On this information to other classmates that we

Might not have e-mail addresses for.

Hope to see you there.

PEGGY CARSON

DON WATSON

WAYNE BATEMAN

JERRY SCHERER

BILL MAY

CLASS of 1950

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Harvey Zimmerle

HARVEYZimm@aol.com

(Harvey sent this to me which was written by the two men signed below that used to send lots of contributions before their passing. How glad I am that Harvey sent this to us).

Ann

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

 The Great Depression in the USA was a period of economic hardship that roughly began in 1929 and lasted through the 1930s into the early 1940s. People can read about the period or hear about it from their parents, but unless you actually lived during this time it is difficult to grasp how severely people’s lives were affected. Although some people were affected less than others, everyone felt the adverse effects of The Depression. With this in mind, a couple of us “oldtimers” decided to relate a few Depression experiences as we remember them. We were sub-teenagers or teenagers during that period.

 First of all, it is true that everything was cheap at the time. However, most people had very little money and they only purchased the barest of necessities. The average person who worked in a store or business or in most jobs probably made from $18 to $20 per week. Tradesmen were probably paid similarly whereas laborers probably received less. If they could find work, teenagers made about 15 cents per hour. During this period the local shoe factory sometimes had openings and quite a few young people got their first jobs and worked there until they could find better jobs or ones more suitable to their liking. In the early 1940s the pay there was about 50 cents per hour, $20 per week, or $80 per month. It helped if two people in a family worked, but when one considers that food, clothing, rent, utilities and miscellaneous expenses came from this amount, there was little or no money left at the end of the month. If an unexpected expense came up it often meant that there was not enough money to pay for everything. If money was urgently needed to buy food or to pay the electric or gas bill so it would not be cut off, you could sometimes find a businessman who trusted you who would let you give them a post-dated check in exchange for some ready cash. You would write the check with a one- or two-week advanced date and hope by then that you would have some money in the bank to cover it. In a sense it was a short-term loan. On rare occasions you might have to go back and post-date a second check to cover the first one.

 Basic Necessities—Shoes. Young boys usually got new shoes only when their old ones wore out or when they outgrew them. It was customary to get new shoes around Easter time. They were usually purchased too large so that you could grow into them and they would last longer. These shoes were for Sunday and dress-up occasions. When it got warm in May boys usually got new tennis shoes or started going bare footed. The feet of bare footed kids got as tough as shoe leather and they could walk on a hot sidewalk or street without flinching. Unfortunately, even tough bare feet did not offer any protection from cut glass, splinters, or rusty nails. Lots of tetanus shots were given. The tennis shoes lasted all summer and unlike today the shoes were never washed. By late summer they were really smelly and if you went to a Saturday matinee at the movies you did not want to sit near the front where most kids sat. Although the kids did not seem to notice or mind, the odor in these rows was pretty overwhelming. The only thing worse than a stinky tennis shoe was two stinky tennis shoes. By autumn the tennis shoes were pretty worn out and you started wearing leather shoes again. If you got a hole in the bottom of your shoe a piece of cardboard fixed it satisfactorily until it rained. If your shoes were not outgrown and needed repair they were resoled. This was satisfactory until the soles eventually came loose and started flapping when you walked. When this happened you started wearing your dress-up shoes for everyday use. If money became available you sometimes got some lace-up high top boots for winter wear. They had to last for a couple of seasons or until you outgrew them. Although the shoes of the time were well built, since most people walked wherever they went it meant that they received a lot of hard ware.

 Holey socks—Socks were another Depression-era problem. You usually had just a few pair of socks and this meant that the toes and heels eventually wore out from use. Thus, most kids wore darned socks. Once the holes exceeded the darning stage you could take the holey toe and fold and tuck it under the bottom of your foot when you put on your shoe. This also pulled the holes in the heels forward so they did not show at the top of your shoes. Quite often the socks would move and the holes in your heels were very visible again. Although it was embarrassing it was not a stigma because most everyone else had the same problem.

 Hand-Me-Downs—(This section was written by and applies specifically to the family of John B. Summers, but it would also apply to many other families). Any family that had 3 or 4 children back in the 30’s generally wasted little which could be used by the family group. This was especially true of the common materials which had use for anyone in the family who was able to use it. This was a general rule especially with clothing of any kind. As a child outgrew a shirt, or any other article of clothing, it was passed down to the next child in line whom it could fit, or be altered to fit. It was not a matter which was questioned. We got new clothing for very special occasions, but otherwise we made do with what was available.

In our family there were 2 groups of children. My father had a previous marriage that produced 5 children and then a remarriage with 8 more youngsters, 6 of which survived. I was the first born of the second group, and my next older brother was 5 when I was born. Both of our parents worked full time, and my maternal grandmother stayed at our house after her husband died, and kept the house, and the kids on the straight and narrow.

 In those days everyone was struggling with money problems, so it was not often that a new suit, or another pair of shoes, was able to be purchased. That was the time when workers made little money, and at times had to submit to a 10% or 15% cut in wages when required for businesses to exist. My dad worked full time for the railroad, had an insurance agency, and did bookkeeping for a business. My mother was a R.N. and worked full time at the old San.

They kept the family eating and existing above the level of poverty, but there was little extra money which could be used for any extra expenses. The shoe problems which we all had to handle, has already been discussed, and in any family which had several children, the clothing which had been outgrown were never to become dust-rags when the next in line could use it. We thought nothing of having to wear this usable attire, and it was kept in use as long as it was repairable, and we felt no sense of shame because many families were required to hand down useful articles. Families would often pass on to other members their usable articles, and little was wasted in those days. My grandmother would neatly patch any damages that occurred, and sometimes it seemed she would darn the darns in the socks which required it.

We were careful not to tear our clothing, and if it did happen, we expected Grandma to give us her best German lecture on taking care of our possessions. She would repair almost anything which she could, and we always had clean, neat and appropriate apparel.

I often feel that this required conservation of these small parts of our lives has made our generation more careful, and to think several times of how an old possession could possibly be useful for future projects. This tradition has been lost since the affluence of our lives today has altered many habits which we developed because of the difficult times we had in the 30’s and 40’s.

 Trousers—Younger boys wore knee-length knickers or overalls. Overalls were usually for play and for summer wear since they were not as warm as the knickers. Knees in both garments often wore out and were readily mended with patches. Most boys did not get long-legged trousers until the 7th or 8th grade or high school. A boy’s first suit might be purchased when he graduated from the 8th grade when he wore it at baccalaureate and commencement services. Since kids grow rapidly at this age the trouser legs would be let out as the boys grew. When they could no longer be lengthened you continued to wear them as they were even though they were extremely short. They were referred to as “high waters.” It was embarrassing to wear high waters but the feeling was ameliorated by the fact that other kids wore similar clothes. Outgrowing the waists of trousers was no problem because most kids stayed rather thin.

 Food—People who lived in town had to buy all of their food except in the summer when some obtained vegetables from their home gardens and fruit from back yard trees. Any excess was canned for winter consumption. If they had space, some townspeople also had their own chickens. In addition to having gardens and fruit trees, people in the country also had access to their own beef, pork, poultry and dairy products and were rather self-sufficient regarding their food. What they lacked was money. Some farmers sold their excess poultry, eggs, butter, fruit, etc., to townspeople to obtain ready cash and it was beneficial to both parties.

 For really economical meals nothing could beat the cheapness of cooked dried beans or fried cornmeal mush. A pound of navy beans costing 5-10 cents per pound and a day-old loaf of bakery bread for a nickel could feed a family of four. Bread was normally 10 cents a loaf, but since it did not contain any additives to preserve freshness it was stale about one day after being baked. Cornbread was also often eaten with beans. For those unfamiliar with cornmeal mush it is sort of like southern grits (Georgia ice cream) that has been compressed into a sausage-shaped roll. For cooking you cut the mush into slices and fry it like sausage. Although rather flavorless, when it was covered with butter and syrup or molasses it was palatable. The sorghum molasses was pretty strong tasting and was a second choice after regular syrup. If hungry, however, you took what was available. Quite often, fried or scrambled eggs were eaten along with the mush. It might not have been a balanced meal, but it was tasty enough and economical.

 Housing—Although some people owned their own homes, many lived in rent houses. Although rents were comparatively cheap, the regular monthly payments drained the meager assets of many families, especially if the breadwinner had a low paying job or became unemployed for some reason. If a person could not pay their rent or make their payment on a house they were buying, they were often not evicted. The prospect of landlords eventually getting paid by delinquents was better than having an unoccupied house producing no income whatsoever. Similarly, banks often did not foreclose on mortgages because an empty house produced no interest income and deteriorated if unoccupied. Paying the rent probably came last after buying food and paying the gas and electric bills and buying coal for heat in the winter. In those years in Olney natural gas was available for cooking, but most heating was done with coal or wood. Regarding electricity, it was mainly used for lighting because there were few electrical appliances at that time. In the average house the lighting in most rooms consisted of a single cord dropping down from the ceiling and containing one bulb. In the dining and living rooms there might be a ceiling fixture or possibly a simple chandelier. In rooms there might be single electrical outlet in the baseboard or in the floor if the house had a basement. This could be used for plugging in a floor lamp. Even though electrical use was minimal, in most families everyone was admonished to turn off the lights when they left a room. Thus, today when you see elderly people following their grandchildren around turning off the lights in unused areas, you know the elderly people grew up during The Depression. These elderly people are the same ones that will stoop over and pick up a penny dropped and not picked up by a present-day teenager. To the elderly that penny represents two or three pieces of candy that they were able to buy with it when they were children.

 Automobiles—Even though automobiles were comparatively cheap, the average person did not own a car and in small towns it was common for people to walk everywhere they went. If you went shopping or to a movie downtown you just walked there and back. If a young man had a movie date he would walk to the girl’s house, they then walked to the movie, after a coke or an ice cream cone he would walk her back home, and then he would walk back to his home. Depending on where his date lived, a young man might walk quite a distance in an evening. Even so, it is doubtful if boys selected their dates by how close they lived to their own homes. Conversely, only individual girls know whether they chose their dates based on whether the boy might have access to the family car. All children walked to school and thought nothing of it. Before the North Silver Street School was built, children from that part of town had to walk all the way to the Cherry Street School. This was quite a long walk for a first- or second-grader, especially if it was cold or raining. If you did own a car you had the advantage of being able to buy cheap gasoline. In about 1930 they had the old-fashioned hand pumps that held 10 gallons in the glass cylinder at the top. Gasoline was 10 cents per gallon, and if you bought 10 gallons they would pump one more gallon in the cylinder for you. Thus you got 11 gallons for a dollar, almost nine cents per gallon.

 Travelling out of town—If you owned a car you could obviously drive wherever you wanted to go. If you were going east and west you could take the Baltimore & Ohio railroad train that ran three or four trains each way every day. Some were through trains and only stopped if flagged. Many people went to St. Louis to shop or to go to a Cardinals or St. Louis Browns baseball game. Yes, St. Louis did have two baseball teams. You could leave Olney about 7:30 in the morning and in about three hours be in St. Louis. Although it was a comparatively long distance, you could walk from the railroad station to downtown, or you could take a streetcar. Women could have all day to shop downtown and men could take in an afternoon baseball game. The women and men went on such trips separately, with two or three women shopping together, and three or four guys taking in a baseball game. If our memories are correct there was a nice cafeteria downtown that was called the Forum. The food was excellent and memorable. In the late afternoon there was a return train to Olney and you could be home by about 9:00 that night.

 If they had access to a car and a little money, sometimes in the summer a carload of boys would drive to St. Louis to attend a baseball game and perhaps visit Forest Park and the zoo. That evening they could fill up on cheap White Castle hamburgers and cokes. White Castle burgers were small and had a distinctive flavor due to the fried onions used instead of pickles. The burgers just cost a nickel and you usually did not eat just one or two of them. People normally ate 4-6 or more at a time, and you bought them by the sackful. They were called White Castles because their little white metal buildings were shaped like small castles with parapets. If it was too late to drive back to Olney the boys might just spend the night in the park sleeping on the ground or on a bench. It was safe and the odds of getting robbed or mugged were practically non-existent.

 Hoboes—Although hoboes or bums always existed, it seemed they were more numerous during the Depression. If a single man lost his job he possibly tried to find work in another area, and if unsuccessful he gradually transformed into becoming a hobo. They usually went from area to area by hitching rides on freight trains, but they sometimes just walked. Without a job it became necessary to beg for meals or food, and after a while it became a way of life. People who lived near the railroad tracks were the ones the hoboes most often asked for a handout. They would usually offer to do some yard work or chore in return for a meal or some food. They often begged around mealtime and kind-hearted housewives often prepared them a plate of whatever was available. It was not uncommon to see a poorly dressed hobo sitting on the back porch steps eating a meal. They sometimes got bread, cheese, bologna, canned goods, etc. which they took to eat in their hobo camps located by the railroad tracks. If you walked along the tracks, which young people were advised not to do, you could see empty tin cans and remains of campfires they had built. Hobo camps were noticeable near the Catholic Church Cemetery and under the railroad bridge on South Elliot Street. It was rumored but not proven that the hoboes had ways of leaving messages or marking houses to indicate to other hoboes which houses were the best ones to visit for a good meal or handout.

 When people did not or could not pay their bills it was not because they were trying to cheat anyone out of honest debts, it was just because they did not have enough money and there was absolutely no way to increase their income. It is doubtful if anyone in small towns such as Olney reached the starvation level, but some individuals probably had restricted diets and could have benefited health-wise from a more varied diet and a more plentiful supply of food. Many parents probably felt badly from not being able to furnish things that their children wanted or actually needed, and many fathers probably felt terribly inadequate from not being able to fulfill all the needs of their families. The only consolation was that most everyone suffered similarly under the austere conditions of the Great Depression.

John B. Summers and Jim Dale—Class of 1940

Janice Bagwell Ma

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I remember JW Musgrove also.  I think my father once said we were related to them.

Janice Bagwell Ma

Class of ‘61

John Helm

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Ann:  Just finished reading your Olney Memories #126; two things to report from here.  My late wife Helen (Shultz) worked as a waitress at Bower's Drug store for some time; she was always commenting about how the businessmen would come in for coffee.

  I went to Silver Street School, and was one of the guys who hung around J W Musgrove to keep people from picking on him.  He was a nice kid.  There was a comment about how J W could reel off baseball statistics.  I have a grandson who is autistic; he never forgets anything he's taught or told.  Good to see the response you got about Nixon's visit to Olney by train.

John Helm

Class of '58

🎶🎶🎶🎶🎶🎶🎶🎶

Olney Tigers Olney Tigers

Fight right through that line,

Take the ball clear through the end field

Touchdown sure this time, rah rah rah!

Olney Tigers Olney Tigers

Fight boys for that fame,

Fight fellas Fight Fight Fight

We’ll win this game!!

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