

Resident has seen three centuries of life on Planet Earth

by Terry McNamee
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When Christmas day dawned 100 years ago, Hilda Brunton's mother was welcoming the gift of a new baby girl born late on Christmas Eve, 1899.

"A quarter to 12, Mother said — Santa Claus brought me," laughs Mrs. Brunton. Born in the 19th century, and having spent her life in the 20th, she now looks forward to what the 21st will bring her.

The retired schoolteacher has seen her whole world change around her in those 100 years. From the coming of the automobile and the airplane to the arrival of television and manned space flights, her life and her memories of a changing world have become a part of the history she once taught.

Mrs. Brunton came into the world in a little town of about 400 residents near Ottawa. Like most babies of that time, she was born at home, a middle child in a family of five.

"I was the fourth one, the second girl, so I wasn't important," she said. But that didn't hold her back, as she was determined to get an education and make something of her life.

Shortly after she started school, her family moved to St. Catharines, where she grew up. She has lived in Vineland since 1959.

When she was growing up in St. Catharines, it was a much smaller place. There were no cars, and transportation was on foot or by



Mrs. Hilda Brunton is one of the few people in Lincoln who has lived in the 19th, 20th and now the 21st century. She turned 100 years old on Christmas Eve.

train, streetcar or horse.

"You could go to Port Dalhousie for a nickel on the streetcar," she said. "It was a big treat to go down to Port Dalhousie Park, but I didn't often have a nickel to go on the merry-go-round."

She still remembers her first ride in an automobile in 1912.

"My uncle from Chicago was the first member of the family to have one," she said. "He drove it up here." She had to wait until 1920 before her parents acquired their first car.

In the summer of World War I, she worked at McKinnon's on Ontario Street in St. Catharines.

"We were inspecting bullets," she said. "We were in high school at that time. My dad worked in the muni-

tions factory. He was disappointed he was too old to go to war."

After high school, she became a teacher.

"When I wanted to teach, my mother said I had to teach five years before I paid off the cost of my schooling. I thought that was an awfully long time, but I taught 15 years before I got married."

When the prosperity caused by the war came to a halt, it brought the Great Depression. Times were tough for everyone.

"We never did have too much money floating around, so it didn't affect me as much as some of my friends," she recalled. "I was teaching then, so I got a salary."

When she married Clyde Roland and moved to a farm in Rockway in 1935, she had to quit her job, which disappointed her because she loved teaching.

"At that time, you couldn't teach after you got married — you weren't allowed," she said.

In the early 1950s, she was able to return as a supply teacher, and that led to a permanent teaching job. In all, she taught for 29 years, first at Maywood, Vineland, Mountview and Consolidated between 1921 and 1935, then, after having four children, at Mountview, Rockway and Jordan. She retired in 1962.

"I was very fortunate in the schools I taught," she said. "The staff were nice and the children were nice."

Her first husband died in 1953, and she married an old friend, Harry Brunton, in 1959.

Since she retired, Mrs. Brunton has seen a lot of changes in the way children are treated and the

way children behave.

"I wouldn't want to teach today," she said. "Then, you had control of the children. Today, you don't."

"I think the biggest change is the attitude that the young people have towards their parents. I think that's because the parents are working and leave their children with babysitters."

She said a lack of respect for others is a problem in today's society. She is also concerned that children are not being allowed to create their own fun.

"We used to arrange our own activities," she said. "We read stories, played games. We played hopscotch and jacks and skipping. You don't see that anymore. We played hide and seek, Jacob and Rachel, Farmer in the Dell, Fox and Goose. But now it's all organized. The parents plan what the children are supposed to do in their spare time today."

Transportation, central heating, indoor plumbing, instant communication and medical advances have changed the world during Mrs. Brunton's lifetime.

"The airplane has brought the world closer together," she said. "We never knew what went on in China and Japan then. Today, we know it the day it happens."

"Medical science has done a lot. They've made a big change in people's lives."

Mrs. Brunton attributes her long and healthy life to wholesome food and good parental care.

"My mother was a wonderful woman," she said. "She didn't have an easy life, but she made the best of it. She was always interested in the church and politics. She was very keen on Nellie McClung."

"Mother was a clever woman. Of course, I didn't realize it until much later! I had to grow up to realize it."

Later in life, Mrs. Brunton spent a lot of time travelling, seeing places she had once taught her students about. In 1984, she even took a trip around the world.

"I've had a good life," she said. "I think God arranged it very well. I have oodles of real good friends. Even when the old ones died off, I had new ones. Today, they're a lot younger than I am! But they're good to me."

"I'm very thankful for the life I've had. I've got a wonderful family. I'm very proud of them."

These days, Mrs. Brunton enjoys playing bridge to keep her mind alert, but failing eyesight means she can no longer read, and she misses it terribly.

"A perfect Sunday afternoon was a good book, an apple and candy. There was nothing I liked better than that."

As the new century dawns and a new millennium arrives, Mrs. Brunton has some advice for those looking towards the next century.

"Don't worry! Things work out. I think your life is planned for you. Don't interfere too much."