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**Mull'n it Over**

with

**Bonnie Mullen**

The following are excerpts from an article written by the late W.B. Elsley and published in 1984 which he entitled, "Rambling Thoughts of a Child's Life in Campbellville at the Beginning of the 20th Century." The life of village children then is a world apart from the experience of our children today:

"The big wood stove at S.S.#1 School was an important and popular part of the school. In extremely cold weather, frost bitten hands and faces had to be dealt with before school could get underway. Every ten minutes a different class would stand in front to be taught a lesson, while the rest of us were working at our desks. During the teaching of the eight grades each of us would be exposed to the whole elementary curriculum and could learn as much from other classes as our own, if we desired. Those who did not desire, had problems with the Entrance Exam and mostly went to work early. There was a large woodshed back of the school and two outhouses.

Village life and experience provided another great source of education. We kids had the run of the village and as long as we behaved ourselves, as we did most of the time, we were welcome to observe the trade and commerce and life in general as it happened in our small community.

Weirs Blacksmith Shop was a favourite with horses being shod and the forge where red hot iron was skillfully shaped by hammer and anvil with sparks flying all directions and then terminated with a hiss of steam when dipped into water. This was done by big strong men clad in leather aprons and each with a great sense of humour. The work was hard, but interspersed with jovial conversation and vocabulary. There was nothing these men could not make with iron. Together with the car-

**Early childhood life in Campbellville**

riage works next door they produced sleighs, wagons and furniture to meet the needs of the community.

The railway played a major role in our lives. It provided a focal point at "train time," several times a day. The romance of railroading was at its height. I had a real passion for the great steam engines and never ceased to enjoy drawing them. The railroad provided our contact with the outside world. Often trains wakened us at night, struggling and snorting up the heavy grade leading into Campbellville from the east. My first dog was killed by a train and I have a vivid picture in my mind to this day of a boot with a foot in it that belonged to a deaf teamster who worked at the sawmill and was run over by a train.

The sawmill had its dangers too, but we were not scared away and shut out from it. We often watched Bill Anderson stoke the great boiler with sawdust to produce steam to power an engine with an eight-foot flywheel and an enormous belt that ran from it to operate the car and circular saw that reduced the logs to lumber. The logging operations and lumber yard were all part of our village domain.

A large dormant frame building, the Drill Hall, had been hastily built for service during the Boer War. I am amazed at the amount of military equipment that was left about. We boys could get into it and we had a wardrobe and arsenal of white pith helmets, parts of uniforms and unspent ammunition. We never took the stuff out of the Drill Hall. There must have been a guardian angel presiding over our experiments with cordite extracted from the shells. The hall was put into service again in 1914 during the early preparations for WW I.

Our village was blessed with three ponds of sparkling water good enough to drink that provided fishing, swimming and even boating experience. There were no organized programs. In winter we shoveled off the snow for skating and hockey. Community skating at night by the light of the moon or a large bonfire was a delight that no rink can provide. There was also a community hall above the Emporium for dancing, amateur theatre and even basketball.

Our society was narrow-minded, prejudiced, poverty stricken and the annual 12th of July (Orange) Parade fanned the Catholic-Protestant division. Nevertheless there was a high degree of co-opera-

tion and tolerance of our differences, too. The land for the Presbyterian Church was donated by David Wheelihan, a staunch Catholic.

For several years livestock was slaughtered locally and taken to the Hamilton market. The slaughterhouse was a gory place. The animals were killed, skinned, gutted and quartered. The bludgeoning and pig sticking did not shock us onlookers but I did shudder a bit when one of the men caught a cup of warm blood from the hanging carcass and drank it.

For most of us the hotel was supposed to be out of bounds. Saturday nights sometimes became a little rough. Staggering drunks were often visible on their way home. Things could get out of hand, such as a wild horse race down the road by the local mountaineers (escarpment dwellers). These people were squatters for the most part and lived largely by their wits. They preferred hunting, trapping and berry picking to regular manual labour. They were a spirited, generally illiterate and very independent lot. Through the efforts of the Temperance Union the hotel bar was closed and the place became a respectable public inn. Our village remained dry for many years and the children became better fed and clothed even though the local bootlegging continued. The hotel provided a useful service to travellers and horse breeders in a country that relied heavily on horse power. When the beautiful travelling stallion visited town and bred mares it provided an ancient bit of erotic show bizz back of the stables for the local men and boys.

The Elsley General Store, with the slogan "The Busy Corner" operated six days a week from early morning 'til ten at night. They supplied groceries, produce, hardware, drugs, dry goods, shoes and even furniture in exchange for cash, barter or credit. A big central stove around which customers sat, chatted or told stories eliminated any need for a local newspaper though the City paper was on sale daily.

The village environment with all its hardships and limitations was rich soil and a suitable climate where young lives could grow and develop along with the crops on the surrounding farms. I am forever grateful for my wise and loving parents who selected such a village in which to raise and support their family of seven and to Almighty God who provided it all."

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