Some things we remember of the Great Depression

Since both John and I lived on farms we were never hungry because we had chickens for meat and eggs, cows for milk, cream and butter, cattle to butcher; often hogs. All the livestock and poultry required considerable work, of course. Large gardens were grown, and most farms had fruit trees. The years in the 1930's were often lacking in rain so that nothing yielded very much unless it was possible to water by carrying the water in pails to the vegetables. Most of us did not have hoses. Everything took a lot of hard work; but we were glad to do all we could.

Mothers and girls did a great deal of mending of work and schoolclothes. When children came home from school, the first thing they did was to change their clothes to keep the school outfits clean and in good condition to last until they were outgrown and passed on to a younger child.

Some of us wore the same outfit or dress all week; if one were lucky to have 2, then he could change off. Many families bought 1 outfit when school started, something for winter if possible. If not, that one was worn all school year - maybe too small by spring - but all of us were in the same boat. We did not concern ourselves with vanity about clothes; there were much more important things in our lives. Often work clothes were patches upon patches. The backs of overall legs were always saved to use as patches when the rest of the overall completely wore out. We even tried to match the degree of fading in the garment and the patch. School overalls for boys were carefully and neatly mended. No mother would have let her son go with holes anywhere.

In One large family in our neighborhood, the mother washed all the school clothes over the weekend to be ready

for Monday morning. In fact, most mothers did that, mostly on the scrub-board.

In summer, many children went barefoot not only for fun, but to avoid having to buy more than one pair of shoes per year. It was common in our small church to see little bare (very clean) feet on Sunday.

Many neighborhoods had a stand-custom of playing baseball on Sunday afternoon in someone's pasture. All were welcome to participate. Most everyone walked from a radius of 2-3 miles. Going to visit neighbors was a much enjoyed occasion. Some families sacrificed small treats to bake a cake for Sunday, hoping someone would come to visit. Then all enjoyed a dish of canned peaches, cake and coffee or lemonade. Those drinks were also a weekend special treat. Real lemons were used to make a delicious drink.

Someone let me know that my

Sunday school children and their parents were going to surprise me on my 17th birthday. I hand squeezed 18 lemons - spraining my wrist in the process, but the party was a great success. The guests brought cakes and sandwiches. There were about 20 children, plus their parents. Several families had 2, 3, or 4 children in the class. The youngest was only 3 years old. We still sometimes see each other, and enjoy our life-long friendship.

Country school Christmas programs were a highlight for the whole community. Sometimes a Thanksgiving program added variety to the entertainment. Every child had some part in every program. I remember that a little boy and I (second grade, 6 yrs old) dressed as an old couple sang, "Put on Your Old Gray Bonnet" - celebrating a fiftieth wedding anniversary! In the mid 20's a 50th anniversary was extremely rare.

In the later 30's, John worked as a hired man for 3 years. He did whatever was needed - all hand labor. Work began early and ended late, especially in spring and fall. He was paid $1.00 a day, had a bed to sleep in; all meals, and work clothes laundered. He saved most of what he earned which was big help when we were married in 1940.

We used shoe laces - most shoes were laced. When a lace broke, we carefully sewed it together; and also a second time. Then it became hard to go through the holes so we spent 5¢ for new laces for offords. Probably longer laces were a few cents more. In all ways we did all we could to make everything last as long as possible.

Neighbors helped each other in whatever way was needed. In oats threshing time 2 or 3 ladies and their little children came to help with the big meals and afternoon

lunches. The children had a great time playing while their mothers worked diligently. When it was threshing day at another's home, work was exchanged by ladies - just as the men did. Young responsible boys helped in various ways, and were treated as adults.
Young girls watched over the small children and babies and were truly appreciated. Many of these customs were common long before the depression - so were not something new; but were especially helpful during hard times.

All of us learned who true friends were, because they stuck with us under all circumstances.

My Grandfather Pallas lived with us after Grandma died. He passed away in 1935. He had 8 children; several contributed what they could for the funeral and hospital bill. Some simply could not help. One's second wife

(first wife having died of appendicitis, leaving a baby and 2 little boys 3 & 5 years old) took in washing to earn a little to contribute. We felt that was truly a loving sacrifice and gift. She had not been in the family very long.

Karl, we respect you for your concern for our environment. We wish we knew you better.