

## May Reflection

Reflecting on how God has been working throughout our lives, is fascinating to me. Today I want to share some of my mother, Alvena Kuhl's memories of the Great Depression from her book, "My Quilt of Life"

Mom was born in 1915, the eldest of twelve children to Harry and Elizabeth (Weppler) Karn on their Stoney 100 acre farm in Sullivan Township near Dornoch. From the time she was in Pubic School she had dreamed of writing a book about the history of her community so that future generations would be aware of how their ancestors had overcome their hardships with ingenuity and faith in God.

In 2005, when she was 90 years old, she said, "Well I guess I'm not going to get my story written."

So I said, "If you tell me what to write, I'll help you to compile it." With her amazing memory, her skilful story telling, and family and friends sharing their technical skills, we were able to produce her book, which she named, "My Quilt of Life" because quilting had been her lifelong hobby.

By Doreen White





### Surviving The Depression

I don't know of people going to bed hungry, but I do remember that there wasn't much variety in our meals. However, I still recall the delicious aroma of homemade bread, cured ham, and delicious pies.

Money was really scarce on the farm. We got our money for groceries by selling cream, butter and eggs. Come fall, the hens quit laying and the cows went dry, so the farmer's wife had to pack eggs in layers of salt and use them for baking. (I can't find words to tell you how delicious fresh eggs tasted in the spring, when the hens started laying again.) A crock of butter had to be prepared also and stored for the winter. There just wasn't enough money for buying fresh fruit and vegetables, and there weren't any available in the stores anyway, so everybody had a large garden. We filled a root cellar with potatoes, carrots, turnips, dried corn, apples and beans. (Beans provided variety: bean soup, and baked beans were a real treat, especially if bits of meat were added halfway through the cooking.) There was a crock of sauerkraut and one of pickles as well.

We were thankful for hand-me-down clothing and just adored the things our mothers so lovingly fashioned for us, with help from pictures in the Eaton catalogue. We even appreciated the garments she made from bleached flour bags.

I think one of the things that helped the morale of the people was the "bees" which they organized to help to clear land, build barns, thresh or buzz wood. Neighbours gathered to lend a hand. The wives came along, bearing baskets of goodies. Delicious food was pooled and much enjoyed. Sometimes the women set up a quilt and oh, how the tongues and needles flew! Whatever job had to be done, "many hands made light work" and everybody enjoyed the fellowship and often the day ended with a dance in the home. Music was supplied by local talent.

According to my memories, the lack of money was offset by trading goods and



services. Long lists of things exchanged hands. My mother once hemmed a dress for a fresh batch of my neighbour's yeast (made from hops.) If this got spilled, it was a catastrophe!

Popular sayings were: "**If you haven't got what it takes, we'll just have to figure out how to get along it without,**" and "**waste not want not.**" There sure was little garbage and we always enjoyed leftovers.

Healthwise, I recall, there was usually a home remedy for most things that we were afflicted with, and there was always **castor oil and epsom salts** and the sure cure for all: **sulphur and molasses!**

Heading my list of bad memories of the Depression is **chillblains** and there just didn't seem to be anything to help them, and how they did annoy us! We didn't have the warm clothing that is available now and I'm surprised that we survived as well as we did! We were thankful for the straw mattresses, feather comforters, and even for itchy, pure wool blankets! Another memory of the Depression is the homemade soap made from scraps of fat and Gillette Lye -- powerful on dirt, but what it did to our skin! ... Certainly not pleasant!

It was very difficult for us to eke out a living with so many children on a stoney farm, but we managed because Dad cut and sold a lot of wood. Prepared cereals were too expensive for us, so we were happy to have porridge. In the Fall, when it was ripe, we went out and cut sheaves of wheat with sheep shears. We tied the sheaves up in little bundles and hung them on the walls of the driving shed. We picked out the choicest heads and threw away the weeds. Dad had special sieves that he put in the hammer mill. We placed the head of grain on the screens and took turns turning the crank for hours to get lots of wheat for porridge. With plenty of milk and brown sugar, it sure tasted good!

We made do with what we had. We found that we could make ourselves good



toothpaste by mixing salt and soda and a swish of peppermint.

The neighbours made us skis from an old fence rail with a leather strap to hold our feet in place, and with an old broom for a pole ... we were off skiing! There were lots of hills and we never had a broken bone, but hours and hours of fun! We always had a little hand sleigh and some homemade toys. There were always rag dolls, and we made paper dolls by cutting pictures of people and articles of clothing from the Eaton's and Simpson's catalogues. We did most of our shopping out of catalogues and once in a while we got to Owen Sound.

We certainly were blessed with wonderful resourceful parents, who worked so hard to make our lives enjoyable in spite of the difficulties they encountered.

Anyway, I sure hope there will never be another Depression. I am so thankful for the help and support the church provided, with their caring and sharing. We enjoyed our homemade fun and food. We really appreciated our schools, even though we had no running water, and no indoor toilets. We did have dedicated teachers. Through it all, I am certain that **co-operation**, not **competition** is what helped us through the trying times of the Depression.

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