

Life in the Good Old Days

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My daddy was a barber in Choudrant, Louisiana when I was born there in 1917.

During the great depression of the 30s we moved from Choudrant to the farm. There we grew most of our food. He grew peas, beans, corn, potatoes, tomatoes and other vegetables. He also grew apples, pears, peaches, watermelons and cantaloupes. We picked wild black berries, huckleberries, grapes and mayhaws for jams and jellies. Mother, with our help, canned all the things she could and dried some of the fruit.

Daddy had a small mill to grind corn into corn meal. It really made good cornbread!

We also had cows from which we got milk and butter, and beef which Mother canned in a pressure cooker. The pigs were butchered in the winter and some of the meat was canned, but the hams and sausage were cured in the smoke house which was a small one-room structure built of logs with a dirt floor, upon which a small hickory-wood fire was built in the center. The smoke from the fire flavored and dried the meat in about 10 days. The fire had to be kept going each day. The meat was first packed in salt for about a week, as part of the curing process before it was smoked. After curing in this manner, it would keep without refrigeration all spring and into the summer. The fat was trimmed from the meat and cooked in a big black wash pot in the back yard until the liquid fat which cooked out it became "lard" which was stored to cook with. The fat meat cooked brown and crisp from which Mother always made "crackling bread" (cornbread with crumbled crisp "cracklings"). It was not my favorite thing to eat, but our dad loved it.

It was before we ever heard of television, but we did have a radio. We listened to soft romantic music instead of the mod stuff they call music now. We would sit out on the front porch at night in the summer and daddy would play tunes on his violin. He and his brother, Uncle Ed, used to play violin and guitar for parties when they were young and got paid for it.

When we were in high school, daddy and a young man who was our neighbor played violin and guitar and we would gather in one of our homes in the neighborhood and dance. We had a great time.

Families used to do more things together then, and it was nice. Really, a great time when I look back on it now. I just wish I had known as much as I learned later, so I could have changed some things in my life—like maybe going for more education.