

During the BIG DEPRESSION adults were apt to gather at one another's houses to play cards or pass the time together. I never heard of baby sitters until I was old enough to be one. (The wages were fifty cents until midnight and twenty five cents for every hour after.) At any rate people would bring their children along and we could play together.

On the night I wish to share with you my father's brother, his wife and children, along with a neighboring family and their children were visiting my parents. We kids went up to play among all the things that were stored in our attic. My mother thought nothing of using a double socket with only one light bulb and the second socket empty...a very dangerous practice!

On the night in questions we had decided to play "OLD KING COLE". It wasn't really a game and had no rules. We took the stuff that come to hand and built what we took to be a very impressive throne for the king. My cousin Carolyn got to be the king! There were some fancy brass curtain rods scattered about here and there sort of helter skelter. Some of them had filials on their ends. It seemed just the thing to make a scepter for the king. Carolyn ascended to the throne wearing a piece of curtain for a dandy cape. She proudly took the scepter in her right hand, and went prancing off the throne. As she danced majestically around, she accidentally thrust the end of her scepter into the open light socket. Such excitement! Fire blew out of the open socket and the lights went out all over the house! It was a lucky thing a fuse blew out or she might have been electrocuted!



Mamma had no extra fuses and the current breakers of our day had yet to be invented. One of the visiting adults suggested placing a copper penny behind the broken fuse to mend it. Clearer heads prevailed because it was known to be an unwise thing to do and fraught with danger. Our neighbor had an extra fuse and walked home to get it.

Mamma served coffee and cake and we all had a fine time. I wish I could say mamma learned a lesson when the brass rod in the empty socket caused a night to remember, but she didn't. Mamma wasn't one to learn from her mistakes. She did however have a kind and warm heart and we all loved her dearly. One member of the family even called her AUNT BEEBA. The cousin who bestowed that name was called Mae so mamma always called her PEG. (as long as it made them happy...and it did!)

Mamma had a checking account and the quaint idea that as long as she had checks, it was OK to write them. This made for a disorderly mixed up system and destroyed the composure of most of the members of the family. My grandfather, on my father's side, died before I was born. He had been one of the founders of the local bank and my father was on the Board of Directors of the Building and Loan Association. Mamma was bouncing checks on a pretty regular basis which led to many embarrassing moments for the rest of the family who were fiscal conservatives. Every time Mamma overdrew her account she was fined two dollars which bothered her not at all! She did this so frequently the bank finally asked her to close her account which was a first for the family. Everyone was humiliated and disgruntled except Mamma. She tore her supply of checks in half and remarked "I never wanted the damn things anyway".

There is no way I can ever find out who first came up with the idea that my Mother should learn to drive a car. None of her sisters ever drove so it certainly did not run in the family. My father set out to help her learn how to operate his Chrysler Sedan. His car had crystal vases at each side of the rear seats so bouquets of flowers could be arranged therein.



There was a dent on the dashboard where the first owner's child had broken his neck when the car came to a sudden stop and he was catapulted from the front seat. This unfortunate incident killed him and his parents could not bear to look at the machine that had brought his young life to such a ghastly end. They sold it to my father, at a good price, just to get rid of it.

My father undertook his task of teaching Mamma to drive. Alas it was not to be an easy job. It set off a chain reaction of crazy adventures and unfortunate happenings in many areas of our lives. Mamma had no talent for operating a motor vehicle and my father had no patience with her performance behind the wheel. They made a real effort to succeed in their endeavor, but the end came when they realized they could not continue working on this ill advised project.

My father wisely prevailed on his friend Steve to take over the unfortunately chosen plan. Steve drove one of our school busses and he and my father took turns year after year being either President or Superintendent of the Sicomac Sunday School.

About three nights a week Steve would arrive to take Mamma out for her driving lesson. I think I was in first grade at the time. One day I was in school waiting for the bus to take me home when who should appear in the hallway but Steve. Wishing to impress the other kids with how I knew Steve I ran after him yelling "Steve are you taking my mother out tonight?" My father's sister was a teacher there and when she went home and told the family about what I had said, they had conniptions, fits and all kinds of things!

Time passed by and the lessons continued until some misguided person decided my mother was ready to take the test for her driver's license. Big Mistake! There were few Motor Vehicle Inspectors at that time so every time Mamma went to be tested she had the same man. After three successive failures they knew quite a bit about each other. Mamma knew his wife, Katie, who had a pedigreed fox terrier she wanted to breed. As luck would have it mamma had a good fox terrier stud dog. By now I guess they all knew Mamma would never get a driver's license in the usual manner. A deal was made that their terrier bitch would be serviced by my Mamma's stud and Mamma would pass her driver's test. The stud, unlike Mamma, knew what to do and did it!



I recall they put the dogs in my father's two car garage and carefully stood up on cinder blocks to watch through the window until the deed was done. They did not give me a cinder block of my own! Like magic, my mother was a licensed driver in the state of New Jersey!

Another more or less regular visitor at our home was an old Jewish peddler who used to come by about once a month. His high black shoes were cracked and broken like he was, from old age. He used to come up from Paterson on a small bus called a jitney. He carried an ancient and battered suitcase containing a few small items to sell. It was the depth of the depression. When he came my mother would give him a cup of black coffee to drink. She always bought some little thing even if it was only a pair of shoe laces. In his pockets he always had a few pieces of candy for the children he knew along his route.



His name was Mr. Rhodes. I don't know how it got started but we all called him Poppy Rhodes. There were a few things in his case I considered strange and unusual. One was a shop worn purse of a far out shade of wild pink. Another was a huge pair of bloomers to fit a gargantuan lady. They were made of a strange pinkish orange material with rather long legs that ended in a band of elastic. I wonder who ever bought them; what a giant woman she must have been!

I recall the day we saw the notice of his death in the "Paterson Evening News". No family members were mentioned so he must have died as he lived, alone. He was the only Jewish person I ever knew when I was a child. When I realized he had no family I worried about who would bury him. My mother told me he belonged to the Jewish Community and they would take care of it if there was no one else to. It may or may not have been true, but it was a comfort to me.

Now that I am an old lady I lived in a room in my son's house. There were nights I lie down and sleep would not come. On those nights I looked again at the times I remember from my

childhood. I thought of the people long gone, who were part of my life when I was growing up in my father's house. There were people who visited our home who were special in one way or another and I thought again of the way they were and things they did as well as the things they said.

There was Aunt Essie, not really my Aunt at all, it was a courtesy title and one used by most young people who knew her. She had been engaged once, when she was young, and still wore her diamond engagement ring. She had a tumor; she called a wen, on top of her head. It was so large you could see it through her hair. When she was an elderly woman she went to live with her Nephew who could not stand the sight of the ugly thing. He took her to a doctor to have it removed. She told me how the doctor had split the skin, in his office, and had popped out a rather large lump! I was fascinated and old enough to wish someone had taken it off many years before. While her Mother was alive she had lived with her and some other family



members. She had Pekingese dogs over the years and I can recall their large protruding eyes. They would sniffle and sneeze until I feared their eyes would fall out from the pressure. They never did but I always worried about it.

Once as a change of pace, she acquired a cat. She named it "Lavalier" because of an unusual patch of fur on the front of its chest. In due time Lavalier produced one kitten which was Aunt Essie's pride and joy. One sad day the kitten was nowhere to be found. Aunt Essie came to my mother in tears over this dreadful loss. My mother was a sympathetic soul and was doing her best to comfort her friend. Mamma owned a scruffy big Tomcat. He strolled into the room where mamma was urging her friend to drink a cup of tea. He watched all the commotion in a puzzled way and walked over closer to get a better view of the strange goings on. At Aunt Essie's feet he came to a halt, gagged three times and with a huge effort threw up Lavalier's kitten. Aunt Essie was transfixed with horror and Mamma was so embarrassed she liked to die!



I'm still an old lady but I don't live in a room in my son's house anymore. If it is because I got to be a royal pain in the butt or because I got well enough to have my own place, I don't know! I have my own "house" in a place called Leisure World. There is a balcony where I sit in the sun and watch the hummingbirds. I finally found some plants that the hummingbirds like. California hummingbirds seem to be picky, not like the ones on the east coast.



I still don't sleep much at night. I still remember things and people from my childhood. Living alone gives me plenty of time to remember things. I wonder what my children are going to remember from their childhood. My saving grace is that I will be long gone before they get around to putting up some of those things on paper!

One day we were having a party at our house. Everyone was coming in from the yard. Inside, someone asked "Where is the baby?" We all rushed outside and there she was in water. It had only been seconds and we tried to revive her but she was gone. The coroner came. The next day we had to go to the coroner's office to make arrangements. On her head was a very big lump that we didn't see the day before. She had fallen and hit her head so hard that she died instantly. I should have felt less guilt, we thought she drowned and it was my fault for not watching her more closely. It explained why there was not any water coming up as we tried to bring her back. But, she hadn't drowned; she would have died even if someone was walking right with her when she fell.

I have two grand daughters and wonder some times at how much they remind me of my daughters that died. I can only guess how the baby would have grown up and what kind of woman she would have been. My other daughter, "Sis" we called her, died in 1978. She caught a rare disease while traveling. I have heard that parents should not outlive their children. I understand.

I never thought I would live long enough to see either of my granddaughters get married. My granddaughter Rose announced her engagement to be wed in August on the east coast. I had been barely managing getting around, with a lot of help from family and friends. Needless to say, when I started saying I wanted to get to the wedding they were all very skeptical! I started worrying about what I was going to wear, and everyone thought I had finally lost my mind. What they didn't know is that I began walking for exercise. First I started walking around my condo. I had a walker and a wheel chair. I finally was able to use just a cane. I got really tired and would need a nap after just going from the living room to the bedroom and back. I even did the really dumb exercises the doctor had been trying to get me to do; hanging on the kitchen counter, doing things, feeling like an absolute "idjit".

Pretty soon I was trying to walk up the stairs. The day I made it up the whole flight without stopping...what an accomplishment that was! I tried to eat better too. That was the worst part. I love to eat! I even bought a bathing suit and went to the pool for what they call "water aerobics" or something. Just getting to the pool, splashing around in the water with the sun on my face was about all the exercise I could manage, but it was worth it.

The trips to the grocery store were fun practice for getting out and about. I hadn't been going out shopping. Someone else would shop for me. My friends decided that if I was going to a wedding on the east coast I had better at least be able to make it to the grocers! It was quite a production at first. They have little electric scooters at the store to get around in. Pretty soon I was able to walk to the car and from the car into the store using just my cane. Boy did I have fun driving in the store wielding my cane about like I was Sir Lancelot! That is one fun thing about being an old lady; you can get away with things.



No one believed I was really going to the wedding. And, no one could argue that I wasn't in good enough shape to get around. So I went! The wedding was wonderful. The groom was handsome. The bride was beautiful. I saw people I haven't seen in years. I had to take naps, but I made it! And I got to see the radiant look on her face my very own self!



My house has the morning and mid afternoon sun to warm it up and keep it bright. I watch too much TV. I'd rather, than spend all my time thinking about everything all the time. The stuff they have on TV these days! Every now and then I remember something interesting but I have more and more trouble figuring out how to work the computer. I was never able to do it by myself anyway! Some days I wish I had a type writer, but I never liked typing! My hand writing isn't great, but I have friends I tell things too and they say they will pass them on. I can only hope they don't pass on ALL the stories I have told them, at least not on paper!

