

1961

1930s

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1920s

by Rose Storm Summers, 1923

The Terrible Twenties took over our lives while I was a freshman at Ames. Following on the heels of the "War To End Wars," there were so many changes in our way of life that our generation was wholly unaware we were to become the symbol of the great upheaval in social traditions. We just considered ourselves a little more "progressive" than older brothers and sisters — considerably more progressive than our parents!

Indoctrination of coeds was delicately phrased but specific in detail. The Dean of Women, trying valiantly to hold the line, assumed we were all ladies, and as such we would:

Always be completely dressed, including gloves, before we left our rooms; for to put on gloves in public would be as immodest as to put on hose.

When on dates, try to join at least one other other couple in crossing the campus after dark.

When conversing directly with a gentleman, avoid using words that shaped our lips provocatively, such as "prunes" or "soup"; if it were necessary to use such a word, we must turn our faces so he would not be tempted beyond his control.

The latter seemed to hint that college fellows were delightfully more dangerous than the ones we'd gone with in high school, and we could hardly wait to try these words out on our first dates.

Secure in the knowledge that if my date got too fresh I could always slap him, I grasped the first opportunity to smile intimately up at him and ask, "Did your dinner start with soup?"

When all he did was to answer, "Gosh, no!" I tried again, enunciating carefully, "Ours did — and for dessert we had the most delicious prune whip!"

At that he clutched my elbow and started propelling me down the cinder path at a dog trot. I thought, "Oh boy! That double dare was too much for him!" and hung back so we wouldn't get separated from the other couple.

But he only shoved me more vigorously, explaining, "Here comes the Dinky round the bend! Hurry up or we'll miss it and have to walk to town!" And we all took off at a healthy gallop.

No different from high school dates.

Just before the Engineer's Campfire in October, "Dean H" admonished us to beware of any

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1930s

by Laura Christensen Daily, 1935

There are two college-age persons who live at our house and call me "Mom," and they are reasonably well-informed about American history, sociology, economics, and other aspects of our culture. Yet they have one blind spot. They believe that the time of their parent's youth is known as the Olden Days; everyone who lived then was a righteous, thrifty, ambitious "square," and certainly college life bore no resemblance to the enlightened way they are living it now.

"Well, I have news for them, as well as for the rest of you who may share this view — fundamentally our college life was just the same as yours. It is merely some of the "trappings" that have changed.

Just as the center of our Iowa State campus remains substantially the same, decade after decade, so the core of our lives was the same.

Even some of those "trappings" were the same — we ate grilled rolls in the Union, complained bitterly about Union coffee while drinking cup after cup (although most of us had to learn to like coffee after coming to college); Bill Schramper had "Ladies Day" in his business law classes with the same effects; student leaders and faculty complained about the exodus from the campus over Veishea weekend; we struggled with the *Home-maker budget*; we even believed in the tradition of the Campanile at midnight.

Our serious discussions dealt with the same problems — the state of the world (Could it survive another World War?); the state of the nation (Was the New Deal going to make us a welfare state?); the state of the campus.

However, there were differences. The thing that influenced our lives in the Thirties was, of course, the Great Depression. It's hard to know, looking back, whether we realized we were going through such an ordeal or not. I'm inclined to think we went along from day to day thinking of it as normal. However, I don't want to minimize the effect. The hard work, the learning to manage, a certain amount of the self-denial may have been good character builders. I am not sure that the insecurity, the extremity of the self denial, and the sense of futility were.

I can only give you a personal experience. Quarterly tuition was then \$32. Counting a \$20 scholarship, my expenses averaged about \$25 for fees and

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ISU in the 1930's

books. I was fortunate enough to secure a job on a student schedule-making committee which allowed me to earn just about this amount during quarter breaks. With President Roosevelt's New Deal, the SRE (Student Relief Employment) which later became NYA (National Youth Act) brought federal-paying jobs for many of us — sort of a student WPA.

Many, in fact most, of my friends worked in Ames homes for room and board; two of the women's dormitories were cooperative with residents sharing in food preparation and other tasks to cut costs. Almost everyone was in the same financial boat.

The cinderpath between the campus and downtown Ames was a wide and well-walked route. Bus fares were only seven cents, but many of us had to consider even that small saving. Even then it was considered "nardy" (we called it something else, I can't remember what) to carry a brief case; but I found I had to on such a long walk and suffered untold embarrassment until I could get across the campus to my locker in Home Ec. (MacKay was Home Ec.; Curtiss, Ag. Hall; Marston, Engineering or Engine; and the *Daily* was the *Student*, published tri-weekly.)

Mending runners in hose has become to me the symbol of our duress. All coeds wore hose; and, though they were of service weight, they developed runners — and *we mended them*.

There were other differences not strictly of an economic nature. Undergraduate marriages were practically unheard of; there was no Pammel Court. Girls were forbidden to marry during a quarter, and married women were not permitted to live in dormitories as a rule. Smoking was forbidden for women and limited to certain areas for men. (the Cyclone Cellar in the Union, for instance).

There were few cars among the students, and this probably accounts for the biggest difference in social life. All-campus social activities were more important and more widely attended. All-college formal dances were more frequent and popular; and dress was really formal with full-length gowns and tuxedos.

In fact, all of our life — social, intellectual, religious — was far less casual than it is today. We had some rugged individualists, but I believe on the whole we were more observant of regulations.

There is one question I have side-stepped in camping student life today and that of the Thirties.

Are students less able now, or is the subject matter much more difficult? I don't know. Certainly the body of technological facts has grown astronomically. The angle of approach in many courses has been changed. But were we more hardened to difficult tasks and more likely to have better working habits?

Several years ago the ALUMNUS magazine (with which I am associated) did a small survey on campus among teachers of long experience. We asked them this very question, but we still came up with no definite answer. Some believed the students have less ability now; others, that the challenge is so much greater there is no comparison.

That is likely the answer — we shouldn't compare. Many aspects of life in the "Olden Days" were different, but people (even college students) remain the same.



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