

Reminiscences of a Ninety Year Old London Free Press Reader and Columnist

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Now that I am approaching the nonagenarian period of my life it's time to take stock of where I have been and what lies ahead of me. Many of us have gone through difficult times as the coronavirus continues to affect our lives no matter how old or young we may be. But I look ahead with optimism to a time when medical science will eventually eliminate COVID-19.

I am also encouraged as I look back to ninety years ago when improvements in medicine, science and technology have assisted us in overcoming difficulties and inconveniences of former years. On balance, life has improved over the years. What follows are some examples but there are many more that could be added to the list below:

I can recall friends and acquaintances that died of poliomyelitis, Hodgkin's disease, diabetes and occasionally scarlet fever, some of whom were in their teens. Today in Canada, deaths from these medical problems are rare.

In earlier days a restaurant visit meant that a customer might be seated next to a table where people were smoking cigarettes or occasionally even cigars. Non-smoking areas were often hard to find. With tobacco companies profiting from sales and restaurant owners trying to satisfy both smokers and non-smokers, I was not very hopeful that laws would eventually come into effect prohibiting smoking in restaurants. I am now happy that I was wrong in that assumption.

During World War II young people living on farms were allowed to drive the family car when they were 14 years old. I think this was allowed because they were expected to operate farm tractors and similar powerful machinery on their parents' farms. My two older brothers became soldiers and I was needed to help at home. But many of the older cars and tractors required a device called a crank which was turned with some difficulty and with strong arms in order to start the engine. Car batteries and automatic starters were a great improvement.

Early telephones required an operator who connected callers to the person receiving the call, and phone lines were shared by many other phone owners who could listen in on telephone conversations. Today cell phones allow users the convenience of having their phone with them and having access to speaking, texting, listening to music, viewing pictures and getting directions or information about many topics such as the weather, news or sports events.

Early personal computers required the use of telephone lines to operate either the computer or the telephone but not both at the same time. Printers were slow and noisy and coloured action pictures were limited. So today computers are more versatile and we can communicate easily with our friends and relatives who often live in far away places.

The earliest televisions had small black and white screens and produced programs about the weather, world news, markets and Canadian hockey matches. These programs operated for a limited number of hours daily. Today's televisions give us access to a wide variety of entertainment and world opinions on many topics and on many channels.

Automobiles now have added safety devices. In the early days of safety seat belts there was controversy over whether or not the government ought to make laws requiring passengers to use safety belts. The Swedish company, Volvo, spent a lot of time and money in convincing motorists that their three-point safety belts were indeed a great life-saving device invented by an aeronautics engineer, Nils Bohlin in 1958. One of the concerns at the time was that safety belts might trap passengers in a car that accidentally overturned or entered a water filled ditch or a river. Fortunately, today safety belts are widely accepted and are required by law.

On balance, I am happy to have lived long enough to experience and benefit from many modern improvements. I hope that in the future we will improve our safety and longevity by scientific advancements in climate control, forest fire prevention, cleaner air and pure water.

I am still an optimist. Life is good. I believe that improvements we now experience will continue to help future generations use devices and medical practices that many of us have not yet even imagined.