

OH, THAT'S A GOOD STORY!

Real Stories from the Lives of
Senior Citizens

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These stories represent true stories of elders from senior centers in central Ohio and surrounding communities, as well as a few relatives of the author thrown in. I wish to thank all the contributors who shared the stories from their lives.

We do not know why we remember the things that we do in a long lifetime, but those memories are special because they meant something to us at the time they happened. Sometimes they stay with us a whole lifetime but take on a different perspective as time goes by. That is because we can look backwards and see how an action turned out in the long run. Something stupid we did can turn into a good thing over time or send us in a different direction, where we profited from the change.

Young people can read these stories and see how our lives might have been different than theirs because of the many improvements and inventions since we were young. The inventions changed the way life was lived from one generation to the next. I hope that all ages will enjoy these stories of our elders. We do not want to see them buried with us when we depart this earth.

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Introduction

By: Leslie Smith

Most of these stories were written by Baby Boomers, the generation from 1945-1965, and some older than that. I was born in 1942. This generation is the grandparents and great-grandparents of today. Our lives as young people were very different than that of today's young, due to the fact that we grew up without so many of the things that have been invented since. The reward for getting to live so long is that we can look back at our entire life from a different perspective than when something happened and look at it from a distance. Sometimes, something that seemed really bad at the time it happened can change the path we were on and it might have been needed to make us go a different direction, so we can frame it in a positive light.

When we were young, most married woman did not work outside the home if they had a husband to support them. People could actually raise a family on one paycheck. Most of the multiple things house-wives did have since been turned into businesses or replaced by machines.

Families were usually large due to the lack of good birth control methods. That is how the Baby Boomer name was thought up, I suppose. Kids walked to school so there were schools within a mile of all children. Sundays were spent at Sunday school in churches, for most children, learning the difference between bad and good.

There were no super markets like today. The milkman delivered milk and dairy products, the bakery delivered bread on a weekly route to most houses. Small markets for meat and can goods existed in most neighborhoods. The largest grocery was the IGA store, much smaller than modern grocery stores.

Some of us grew up just as television had been invented. It started with three channels. Most of us had not heard of air-conditioning so kids played outside rather than stay in a hot house. Most families had only one car, if any at all. Most women and teenagers did not drive. Driving was not taught in schools. Woman still hung wet clothes on clotheslines in the yard, until dryers were invented.

People in the suburbs or country still used coal or fuel oil to heat their homes. Phones were invented but we were all on party-lines, sharing the line with some other neighbor.

Most men fought in the Second-World War, the Korean War and the Vietnam wars and they were lucky if they survived the fighting.

We have welcomed myriads of new inventions that came our way and had to learn how to properly use them over the decades. Some of us have reached the saturation point where our brain filing cabinets are just too full. Please do not think it weird if we decide not to learn the most recent technology or are still doing things “the old-fashioned way”. It gets harder to learn new things as a person ages, therefore the saying, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” However, there are many seniors that can and do learn new technology because of the push to keep up and value of the new inventions that help out senior citizens.

Every Saturday six women and one man, of mixed races, met at the Dodge Recreation Center to play Tripoley, a card game. Most were there to socialize in the library, around a large table. We learned to know each other as we bet our pennies in the game. While most weeks were fun, this day proved to be a little testy.

"Hey, you gals want to hear a joke?" Bill began, as everyone got seated.

"Sure," I answered.

"Well, these two blonde girls froze to death in an outdoor movie theatre. They went there to see Closed For Winter!" Bill laughed. He meant the theatre was closed for the winter and the dumb blondes had mistaken the marquee for the name of a movie, of course.

"You told us that one before," Beverly stated, shaking her head.

Leaning toward Beverly, Wanda whispered, "I am so tired of him telling the same jokes over and over. I know that he has Alzheimer's. His poor wife has to put up with this daily."

Wanda was visibly shocked when Bill asked, "What was that you said about my wife?"

"Oh," she hesitated. "Ah, I said that your wife said she loves you."

"Bill, how did you hear Wanda? It doesn't look as if you have your hearing aid on?" Alma asked.

Wanda was turning red by then, not sure that Bill believed her.

"Oh, it's these new glasses that I have. See, the hearing aid is attached to the arm of the glasses. Oh, guess I shouldn't have told you gals, and then you could say anything you wanted to about me."

Rose rolled her eyes and everyone put their pennies in the Tripoley game pots. Between games we ate snacks we brought from home and chatted about recipes and recent events. A smelly man lay on the couch, sleeping. The recreation center was a warming station for homeless people. Alice had a bad reaction to his smell and proceeded to the desk to ask for help in removing the man from the library room. The manager asked him to move to the hallway where he would have to rest on metal benches. She also told him that he couldn't lie down and sleep there, either.

"Wow, she is a strong person to take these guys on," I stated.

"She's just standing up for herself because no one else will," stated Frances, who is black.

"I'd be afraid of a fight," Alice said.

"I try to avoid fights. I have never been in a physical fight in my life. Never had a reason to learn how," I said. I am white.

"Why?" Rose asked.

"Well, I had a good life and never needed to learn to fight. I mean, back when I was in school in the fifties, girls handled things other ways. Oh, they talked behind each other's back but nothing that required us to fight. It was the 1950's, the happy days, for goodness sake," I explained. "I thought everyone lived that way. You look surprised."

Now Rose, Alma, Thelma and Frances, all of them black, were rolling their eyes. Thelma turned livid.

"You knew how things were with black folk from television, I am sure. I am glad that you had a good life, Leslie, but you can't believe that everyone lived like that."

"I went to school with blacks. We intermingled during school time and then went back to our own neighborhoods after school at Central High School. I never knew any personally," I defended myself.

"Well, let me tell you about my life, then," Thelma stated, slamming her cards down on the table. Everyone else became silent.

"I was sold by my mother, when I was twelve years old, to a much older man. He was in his thirties. He took me down to Puerto Rico and forced me to marry him. I had a baby then and couldn't go to school. He kept me in the house doing all the things a woman does to take care of a man and a baby. When I was fifteen, I packed a bag, took his money and my child and left. I never saw him again. I made it home and asked my mother why she did that to me. She just said she knew what she was doing and commented, "What are you going to do? Have me locked up?"

"Oh, my God, Thelma. I'm so sorry."

"It's OK, Leslie. I just wanted to make you understand that black people did not grow up like that TV show, Father Knows Best."

"Well, what did you do then?" Alice asked.

"Oh, I got a job and changed my name because I never wanted him to find me. I moved to Columbus in 1975 because there were more

jobs here. One day, the white man who cut my grass flirted with me. I told him that I had a boyfriend. He said he had never seen another car in my driveway or any men's boots on my porch. He didn't believe me. Two months later he proposed," Thelma stated.

"Wow, two months later?"

"Yeah, I fell fast for him but I was still married. I deserted my husband from Puerto Rico and told nobody where I was for eight years. I thought that meant that we were divorced. When I looked into it, I found out that my husband had died and I was a widow. My second husband and I have been married for 29 years now."

By now, Thelma was smiling again.

"Well, if you're talking about black lives, let me tell you about mine," Frances said.

Everyone's head turned to Frances and laid down the cards in their hands. There was absolute silence as we leaned in to hear her.

"My father had three of us kids and then left us for another woman. He married her and had another three. We would get to see him now and then at the stepmother's house, but that was rare. All our parents were working but when I was fourteen, my stepmother became ill. She wanted to hold her job at a factory because there wasn't any disability leave in those days. So, they made me leave school to work in her position. I didn't even get to graduate Junior High School. They just pulled me out of school."

"Did you go back to school when she got well?" I asked.

"Oh, no, it had been too long. By then, they didn't want her back. The boss wanted me, so I stayed on in her place and never went back to school."

"Oh, that ain't right. The child labor laws must have been different back then," I said.

"You know the funny thing? When my Dad got real sick at the end of his life, I was the one who stepped forward to take care of him. He told me that he was surprised it was me. He knew that he had neglected me. What are you going to do though, he was still my father," Frances admitted.

"Wow," I said.

The black ladies had made their point. I am glad that I didn't know that not everyone in my area of the woods grew up like me, back then. I knew that children were starving to death in India because I was

reminded of it every time I did not eat my vegetables. We often took up a special donation for them at church but that was all so far away that it just made me feel grateful for my food. I didn't really know what went on down south until I was an adult and saw Martin Luther King on television. I guess I was just too absorbed with my own life in Ohio and didn't feel that I could do anything about the situation, anyway. The media in Ohio stuck mostly to regional topics and the newspaper was absorbed with our area.

After the game, I thanked the ladies for telling me their stories and told them that they had educated me. I do feel sorry for all kids today about the horrible stuff they have to put up with. No one told us that life would be fair but we still were protected as children from the vulgarities of the world. I don't think that they will ever again be as innocent as we were, growing up. We didn't have a television until I was twelve and it only offered three stations. All shows bleeped out any nasty words and nothing sexy was allowed. I remember when the Beatles first came to America and it was noted that they wore their hair long, like women, and wore tight pants. That was looked down upon for men. Elvis could only be shown on TV above his waist because he shook his leg and that made the girls in the audiences swoon. Lucy and Desi slept in twin beds on their show. It is my opinion that children should not be subjected to the reality of the bad things in the world. That is a form of protection from evil, but it now seems that everything is thrown at them on the media.

My parents stayed up together for an hour every night; after all of us children were in bed. They discussed all the things then that they would not discuss in front of the kids, keeping any unpleasant subjects from our ears. I once caught a juicy gossip session of my mother and her sisters by climbing under the dinner table. They forgot I was there and they talked about goings on with other family members I normally would never have heard. Children were known as "little pitchers with big ears."