

GOOD OLD DAYS FREQUENTLY LACKED COMFORT

Written October 1999 by Wendy Haskett

When my friend Diana's father visited Cardiff-By-The-Sea, from England, he woke up on his second night writhing in agony. "It was his gall bladder," Diana said, explaining why her poor father got whisked to Scripps hospital in Encinitas for surgery, and spent the rest of his vacation recuperating. However, having experienced British National Health Service hospitals, he thought Scripps was wonderful. He thought his nurses were wonderful. Struggling with his health insurance, though, a task which fell to Diana, was anything but wonderful.

"Modern life," she said. "It's so complicated!"

Complicated---but far more comfortable than it used to be. If a time machine hurtled you back 80 years you'd find yourself risking a dislocated thumb every time you started your car, as you hunkered in front of it cranking up its engine with a handle. You probably wouldn't have a phone, but if you did you'd be sharing it with half a dozen households on a "party line"; and thinking twice before chatting to grandma in New York. (In 1915 calling New York City from San Diego cost \$20.70 for 3 minutes). Of course there was always the chance of a friendly chat with the iceman. He rattled up every week, an enormous block of ice looming in his truck, and hammered off a chunk for you to put in your icebox. It would melt before he returned, but at least it kept your food fresh for a few days. Not many people remember having a tooth filled in the 1920s, when dentists sedated their patients with laughing gas, and powered the drill by pumping a pedal with one foot. But there are lots of us who remember those vibrating, belt-driven dental drills that went out in the '60s. Getting a tooth filled felt rather like being imprisoned underneath a pneumatic road drill. "Dentists used the same needle, over and over, for patients getting an anesthetic," my own dentist, Herb Lowe, told me. "It was the dental assistant's job to sharpen this needle each time. And if she didn't like you" Herb, his voice drifting from behind his sky blue mask, added hastily, "Of course that was long before I went into practice." Those suffering from aching teeth in Encinitas before 1929--when the area's first dentist, Dr. Oscar Gabriel, opened an office on 2nd street--had two choices. They could travel to Escondido, or they could try home-extractions. A quite popular method, so I've been told, was tying double sewing thread around the troublesome tooth, tying the other end to a door knob; and then slamming the door.

Jan Grice, who leads children's' tours around San Dieguito Heritage Museum said that kids often say "Eeeuck!" when she shows them the chamber pot in the pioneer's shanty and explains they were used when someone had to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. (Chamber pots, nicknamed "thunder mugs" in America, were called "guzunders" in England, because they "guz under the bed"). "I tell the children the shanty was built in Olivenhain in 1885, and that, before homes had indoor plumbing, the toilet--called the outhouse--was always placed about 100 feet from

the back door, “Jan said. “On a moonless night it was pitch dark outside, and you were quite likely to meet a wild animal while stumbling towards the outhouse.”

Encinitas got electricity in 1915, water, (from the newly completed Lake Hodges Dam) in 1922. But, incredible as it sounds, Olivenhain didn't have electricity until 1946, or piped-in water until 1961. When Bertha Nesvold fell in love with Art Cole she moved, after their 1941 Cardiff wedding, into the Olivenhain farmhouse that had been in Art's family since the 1890s. It would be 19 years before she could enjoy a hot bath without first having to heat the water on top of her stove. She did have a washing machine, with a gas-powered motor which she kick-started by pumping a foot pedal. “It varoomed into life like a motor cycle,” she said.” And was so noisy we had to keep it outside.” Bertha was thankful for every modern convenience that came into her life. But my mother-in-law, who lived in Scotland, didn't always feel this way. Her sons got her a phone and a refrigerator, but Ma mistrusted both; as I discovered the hard way on my first visit to Scotland. It was during a heat wave in August, 1964. Reeling with jet lag I turned on the taps of the old fashioned bath tub without glancing inside, peeled off my clothes, and stepped into the water. That was the moment I discovered that, in hot weather, Ma always stored her butter and eggs inside the bath to keep cool against the porcelain. “Gosh, I'm so sorry, Ma,” I said later, wrapped in a towel and clutching the soggy cardboard egg tray. She sighed deeply. That night We had scrambled eggs for dinner.

Ma would have made a great pioneer.