

Chapter 3 Growing up Poor

I am part of that amazing generation raised during the Great Depression and World War II. I grew up without running water or electricity, yet saw men land on the moon! I don't think any generation that has walked on this planet witnessed more change, more innovation, or more destruction at the hands of other men than my generation.

Daddy would make trips with the horses and wagon up to Willow Creek or some times east of Declo for loads of sagebrush to burn in the heater and cookstove, to stretch out the coal. He also traded livestock or wheat for flour. He would put new soles on our worn out shoes to make them last a few more miles. I remember putting cardboard inside my shoes to keep my feet off the ground when the holes got to big.

Mother made all of our clothes. A big share of them were made from flour and feed sacks, both printed and plain. Sometimes the printing on the sacks would not completely wash out. She was a beautiful seamstress and our home sown dresses were okay. But the flour sack panties and petty coats (slips) were a great embarrassment to me. I think they taught me modesty, I made darn sure they never showed.

One year as mother and Aunt Janette were making our school clothes, they could not even afford to buy buttons, so they made them out of cloth. My favorite flour sack dress was white with yellow and green pineapple print. She sewed rows and rows of elastic at the waist.

In 1936 Mother went to town and bought us girls each a pretty voile Easter dress and Myron a hat. Voile is a semi-transparent light weight woven fabric, usually made of 100% cotton or cotton blends. One year for Christmas (after the depression had eased) I got a beautiful blue taffeta dress the most beautiful dress in the whole world. Taffeta is a crisp, smooth woven fabric made from silk or synthetic fibers.



Me, Eunice, and Thelma in our new voile Easter dresses. I was 9 at the time.

In the 7th grade, Mother made me a pretty blue skirt. It was very soft material with a gathered skirt and straps over the shoulders. One day at school during lunch break Marjorie, LaPreal, some other friends, and I were in the gym on the upper balcony flirting with some boys that we liked. Someone jerked on my skirt to get my attention. She not only got my attention, she got my skirt. Mother had put snaps on it instead of buttons and every snap snapped open. What an embarrassing moment that was. Talk about a red face! I could do a whole chapter on embarrassing moments.

Most of my clothes were hand me downs from Thelma and Eunice. In Jr High I even got a few hand me downs from my cousin, Romona Peterson. She always had pretty purchased clothes. Thelma got them first, then me and on down to Lorna and even beyond. Mother could never afford pretty clothes for herself. She only thought of us kids.

Every winter as soon as it started getting cold, out would come the “long johns” or long legged “trap door underwear” along with the long oatmeal colored thigh high long stockings and garter belts to hold them up. How revolting that was besides being uncomfortable. We did not have pretty tights that matched our dresses like today. We did not wear long pants to school (or anywhere), girls wore dresses and boys wore pants and shirts. Well, getting back to the “long john story” Just as soon as we would get to school, we would roll down our long stockings and roll up our long johns. Now get this picture, skinny legged little girls running around with big doughnuts at our ankles and two more just under our dresses. During the coldest of winter we would leave them where they should be worn. But with the first hint of spring the rolling returned.

In the 5th or 6th grade at Miller School I had Miss Ward for one of my teachers. She had us doing some kind of little skit, there was a part where someone had to kiss someone on the cheek. The someone to be kissed was Hazel Oaklberry. She was from a very dirty family and always had a snotty nose. No one would take the part of the kisser, so I did. And the whole class went EEWWWWW!

In September 1935 our old Motel T Ford broke down. Despite Daddy's hard work with a few choice words thrown in, it was just worn out. He traded it for a 1928 Dodge.