

August 9, 2000

Dear Ellen-

you asked for a little background information on the notebooks in which I detailed my expenses in 4 years at the U. of T. I grew up in Batavia with vivid experiences of the Depression since we were one of the "poor" families - and we really were poor but my parents refused to go "on relief" - something, as children, we couldn't understand as neighbors had the "relief" truck pull up and drop off food. We lived on the "wrong side of the tracks" until my sophomore year in high school when for the first time we had indoor plumbing, central heating and electricity. I could give the gory details, but that's enough.

I graduated from high school in 1938 as salutatorian of a class of 76 students with little thought of higher education other than an attempt at West Point by taking a test - actually a wasted effort since appointments were political. A 1/2 scholarship offer from Cornell College to play football didn't help because the cost was still out of reach. The owner of the foundry where my father worked as a ~~lab~~ laborer and where the pay was well above average would not hire me until I went to college - then I could have all the work I wanted during

vacations. In later years I thanked him for his position, but, at the time, I thought he was terrible.

In 1938, we were in a recession, and jobs were hard to find. (The recession was really broken by the demand for arms from Europe as the start of World War II developed.) For a couple of months, a lot of us sat around without jobs until I took Chester Lindgren (the foundry owner) seriously and decided to save money for college. I found jobs and worked long hours every day at 25 to 30 cents an hour to save money.

In September, 1939, I enrolled at the U. of I. At that time, admittance was easy - just be from the State of Illinois and a high school graduate. My choice of Commerce was not very scientific and Cavalry R.O.T.C. sounded like the fun of riding horses.

For the first two years, I lived in a small apartment with 3 others in a frame house at 608 E. Healey - a block away from Papp's on Green. The house contained 5 apartments with John Henry from Urbana as the owner - rent was \$4 1/2 a month or \$10.00 for each of us. Three small rooms

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and we did our own cooking rotating days for getting dinner. Sunday night we went to Maid-Rite for a Maid-Rite sandwich and shake for 25 cents. For entertainment on late afternoons, sip a 5 cent Coke at Prehn's and listen to bands e.g. Johnny Mack Brown. Both Prehn's and 608 Healey are long gone.

The last two years were at the Shamrock Coop located at the southwest corner of First and Green. The frame building was replaced years ago by a gas station. About 25 men shared the work including cooking under the supervision of our house mother - a delightful lady who kept us in line and was really loved by all of us. Here, the monthly charge for room and meals started at \$2.25 a month.

This might help explain some of the entries in the daily expenses. To students today, I imagine many items would seem impossible.

- a coke date for 10 cents
- paying 25 cents to sit in the Huff gym to hear big bands (Dorsey, Whiteman etc.) playing for major dances.

- sending laundry home in a laundry box and having a box of cookies included when the clean laundry was mailed back
- going to school with all of your belongings in a suitcase - up to 2 suitcases by the senior year.
- buying a 1/2 interest in a used textbook and sharing the book with another class member - then reselling the textbook and getting as much as \$25 each.
- never having a car at school and the only ones being there with special permits
- etc. etc.

I have enclosed the following -

- the 4 notebooks of expenses
- an old Illinois banner picked up at a farm auction - date of origin not known
- Dance programs

Hopefully, some part of this will be of interest to someone.

Sincerely,
Allan Hicks