

THE WINTER OF 48'

How do you measure 40 years? By the months or days? By the memories of events? By what's happened to your own immediate family or to the outside world? I suppose it's the accumulation of all of this that becomes a bulging file of 40 years. If you were to sort it all, categorize it, and then catalogue it, you would have to look at it with amazement and explain, "My God, a lot has happened in 40 years." In order for us to get a handle on just how long ago 40 years is, let's just focus on one day, January 25th, 1948, the day Shirley and I were married.

To do this, I researched the microfilm section of Carnegie Library. References that far back can only be found on microfilm. That was my first shock. At least it wasn't only to be found on the Ancient History shelves. I looked through the pages of the Pittsburgh Press, Post-Gazette, and the defunct Sun Telegraph for my news and the following was what I found in their columns.

The headlines, much to my chagrin, were not about the marriage of Shirley and Sandy Baskind. They were much more earth-shaking than that. They were weather related, as the first major snowstorm of the winter was blowing east. From 6" to 12" of snow had caused the Automobile Club to issue a warning of "no driving". A high of only 20 degrees precipitated the Manufacturers Light and Heat Co. to curtail the gas supply to schools and churches. Trains were delayed going both east and west, and planes were grounded at Greater Pitt. Workers in the City Parks division fought a game battle to clear the ice-skating areas in Panther Hollow Lake and Highland Park Lake. In New York City, where we were headed for our honeymoon, conditions were just as bad. Mayor O'Dwyer hired up to 10,000 extra workers to keep the streets safe for emergency vehicles. The city was expecting up to 14" of snow and 30 m.p.h. winds. The Queen Elizabeth had its transatlantic sailing cancelled. In the midst of this, the two of us took a sleeper to New York City for a week of big city frivolity. Well, we had frivolity all right, but it was not on the streets of Manhattan!!

Other news items could have been just as well snipped from the newspapers of 1988. A fire in McKees Rocks, a young girl missing from her home, two men shot on a train coming from Cleveland to Pittsburgh, and a headline and editorial concerning Ike Eisenhower's decision not to run for President (shades of Mario Cuomo). Eisenhower's quote was "My decision to remove myself from the political scene is definite and positive. I could not accept nomination even under the remote circumstances that it were tendered to me". We all know of course what happened 4 years later.

Slightly amusing (today, not then) local news reports read like this - "Over expansion is a problem facing steel industry" - "streetcar fares raised to 10 cents, bus fares to 12 cents" - "A crying need for North-South highway through city" (40 years later finally being completed) "Average steel workers wage now \$1.45/hour, bricklayers and carpenters, \$2.00/hour". The last item tells you that the heavy industry wage earner had yet to catch up to other employees.

Also appearing on the front page was a late breaking story about an apparent attempt by Kay Francis, an actress, to commit suicide. She was in a play in Columbus and was stricken while performing with an illness that was later diagnosed as an overdose of sleeping pills. The entertainment world, then as now provided a wealth of material for newspaper readers and one can tell by going through the pages that the newspaper was the source for show biz news that T.V. has taken on today. National columnist's such as Leonard Lyons, Dorothy Kilgallen, Walter Winchell, Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons dragged up to the delight of the readers all the latest New York and Hollywood gossip. Ralph Lewando, Kip Monahan, Harold Cohen and Karl Krug gave us the local angle. On the more personal side, Charlie Danver, Gilbert Love and Florence Fisher Parry with her "I Dare Say" column, gave us the Pittsburgh scene.

The movies were our prime source for entertainment and were there a lot to chose from. Listed Downtown was the Stanley (playing Treasure of Sierre Madre) the Senator (playing Gentlemen's Agreement) the Ritz (With Sleep My Love) the Art Cinema, Barry, Warner, Fulton and the J.P. Harris. East Liberty had the Liberty, Family, Sheridan Square, Regent, Enright, Cameraphone and the Triangle. Shadyside had the Shadyside and there was a theatre at Centre and Craig called the Centre. In Oakland there was the Schenley, the Strand, and the new Oakland at Atwood and Forbes. And in Wilksburg, where today there are no theatres, there were three.

In addition to film there was news about the Opera with Richard Karp directing. The Nixon, which featured a new Broadway show practically every week, was showing the Song of Norway, and that to be followed by the State of the Union and Burlesque with Bert Lahr. The Syria Mosque, due to the weather, had to cancel the performances of Paul Draper, tap dancer, and Larry Adler, harmonica virtuoso. Later on that week, the Pittsburgh Symphony under the baton of Fritz Reiner was to play with Isaac Stern as guest violinist.

So much for the more cultural diversions. On the lighter side there was Jackie Heller's Carousel, with Joey Adams as the comic headliner. Other hot spots were the Ankara on Rte.51, the Club Belvedere in McKeesport, Bill Greens on Rte. 51 and the Jacktown Hotel on Rte.30. If you were only into drinking and the piano lounge type of entertainment, there was the Carnival Lounge, the Cork & Bottle, the Gay Nineties in the Hotel Henry, the Horseshoe Music Bar, the Little Red Door (where Shirley & I had our first date) Mercur's Music Bar, and the Oasis out on Bower Hill Road.

Of course, we also had radio. The radio pages were the counterpart of today's TV section and in addition to the scheduling we found stories about your favorite radio stars. In those times the soap operas were in their heyday. From 2:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon every 15 minutes there was a different serial. Programs such as Life Can Be Beautiful, Backstage Wife, Lorenzo Jones, Ma Perkins, Just Plain Bill and Pepper Young's Family were the kind of true-to-life stories that moved the housewife to tears as they did their household chores.

In the morning, there was Ed & Rainbow, Davey Tyson, The Breakfast Club and

Arthur Godfrey. In the news at noon we heard Hilary Bogden, Bill Burns, Beckley Smith, Louis Kaufman and Florence Sando. The evening national news programs featured Fulton Lewis, Edward Murrow and Lowell Thomas.

Later in the evening, we heard Fannie Brice as Baby Snooks, Information Please, Can You Top This, the Fitch Bandwagon, and the Manhattan Merry-go-Round. And, Oh Yes, all of this came out of your radio from WWSW, KDKA, WCAE, WJAS, KQV, WPIT, and WPGH. Plus, we now had 2 FM stations, WMOT and KDKA.

For those who were in to more sedate type of relaxation, the Carnegie Musuem had a color slide program listed for that afternoon. The title - "Trees".

Then, as now, most of the advertising space was taken by food ads and the department stores. The supermarket stores of the day were Krogers, Donahoes, and McCanns. Krogers made much ado about their coffee brands, such as, Spotlight, Bokar and 8 O'clock. All for 40 cents a pound. In addition, the special of the day was eviscerated (Yuck!) stewing chickens at 49 cents a pound. Donahoes had a 25th Anniversary special. It's famous butter at 85 cents a pound. McCanns, which also had a restaurant, was excited about it's \$1.55 Shore Dinner that included, juice or fruit cocktail, clam chowder, flounder, white fish, or halibut, french fries, lima beans, salad, dessert and coffee. A turkey dinner for slightly more at \$2.00 was also on the menu.

Boggs & Buhl, which was only weeks from a permanent closing, had a Remnent Day Sale that advertised womens dresses from \$5.00 to \$9.00, mens sportcoats at \$5.00, and mens overcoats from \$15.00 to \$25.00. Kaufmans' Downstairs, which also recently closed for good, had a wool suede zip-in hooded womans coat at \$39.95. Meyer Jonassons, a kind of Pittsburgh Lord & Taylor, had it's annual January fur sale. Such furs as Chinese Kidskin at \$194.00, South American Spotted Cat at \$394.00, Chinese Mink at \$694.00 and Sheared Canadian Beaver at \$894.00 were apparently much in demand.

Other stores long gone were Rosenbaums, Frank & Seder, Verners, Fintex, Allen Calman, and Boyds. For furniture, there were Spears downtown, who were featuring a 9 piece modern walnut dining room suite at \$198.00; Palace Furniture had 3 rooms for \$337.00 (\$398 was still in the future) and Hart Furniture in East Liberty had netal beds for \$10.50 and chest robes for \$39.00.

Names that many of you remember, who also showed up regularly in the newspaper ads, were Dr. Baum, a dentist you can trust and he trusts you - Levitske Motors - smiling Lou Abrams and the Smiling Irishman at 4750 Baum Blvd, who would pay up to \$2800 for a 1948 Buick.

Products that appeared to take up a lot of space that I don't believe exist today were Fletcher's Castoria (for childrens constipation) Scott's Emulson (a high energy tonic) Cuticura Soap and Ointment (skin blemishes) Sloans Instant Balm (for colds and aches) Serutan (for daily regularity) Musterole (for congestion & chest colds) The big item for the housewife? Presto Pressure Cookers. The micro oven of it's

day.

If the family however got tired of home cooking, some of the better restaurants in town were Sammy's Steak House in the Beverly Hills Hotel on Babcock Blvd, Frenchy's in East Liberty, Dutch Henry's, The Hofbrau, Joseph's Steak House, Joyce McClements, Tomlinson Hall, The Union Grill, and the Betsy Ross Tea Room. Not a fast food or oriental restaurant was to be found.

Still leafing through the newspapers and coming upon the sports pages on that January 25th, we find that the hockey Hornets have beaten the Washington Caps at 4-2 and were in 1st. place! Baseball news was headlined as the teams neared spring training. Frankie Gustine, who had hit close to .300 the year before, was given a liberal increase in salary to \$15,000. Ralph Kiner, of homerun fame, signed for \$40,000. Other newly acquired Pirates who would join the team in 1948, were Dixie Walker, Steve Rojek, Mel Queen and Ernie Bonham.

Back of the very back of the paper were the comics or as we called them, the funnies. Aficionados will remember, Bringing Up Father, Mandrake the Magician, Tillie the Toilor, Brenda Starr, Steve Canyon and Harold Teen.

Once we got through the "good" parts of the paper, such as the Sports and the Comics, we would start again at the beginning and read about all the new construction that was springing up all over town, now that the war was over and the original Pittsburgh Renaissance was on it's way. A high speed parkway, east and west, was on the planning boards and the papers described it thusly, "the Nations last word in highway ingenuity - no intersecting crossways, traffic will flow freely and at high speeds. Cloverleaves, bridges and tunnels will lead traffic in a determined line." Eventually, this super parkway would lead to the Greater Pittsburgh Airport, which at the time it was built was the second largest in the world!!

Planning was also underway for a Crosstown Thoroughfare, which was to be an extension of the Liberty Bridge and was to continue on to Allegheny River in the vicinity of Duquesne Way. Unless I'm wrong, that connection is finally, after 10 years, being completed and still 2 years away.

Another high cost project in the planning stage was a million dollar elimination of what was called the Frankstown Road bottle neck. The Negley Run Blvd. was the answer and subsequently built. The city probably could have saved the money if it could have foreseen that the East Liberty area was to diminish in traffic and that the Penn Circle removed any congestion at Frankstown Blvd.

Another story of special interest was concerning a resolution passed by the Retail Liquor Dealers Assoc. of Allegheny. It said "We shall prohibit servicing of women at the bar in licensed establishments." Were we that far away from women's lib!

Real Estate News is certainly one way that makes me realize how long ago 40 years was. An article stated that the upper bracket sales group of homes was

\$18,000 and up, the mass market under \$9,000. And on 5th Avenue, in the 5700 block, an apartment house was nearing completion. It would contain 3 room units and rent for \$125.00 a month.

But if you really want to know how long ago 40 years is, this one fact tells it all. Phone numbers were 2 letters, plus 4 digits. Try that on your touch tone phone. And something else. The Vital Statistics column only listed one, -----yes, just 1 divorce. You've come a long way baby!! And so have we all.

Sandy B. B. B.
DEC. 27, 1987