

Herald-Journal

Noel Swain: The More Things Change.....

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My mother kept a daily diary during most of her adult years.

I only found out in January, when my sister gave me her diary from 1989, 30 years ago. Back then, Toy's R Us, Radio Shack and Sears were stores we visited often, and were thriving. There was no such thing as a 'dot com,' and if you mentioned Amazon she'd have thought you were talking about the jungle. I was five years into a financial planning career and my wife and I had living quarters in my rented office.

My mom was 76 years old in 1989 and died 8 years later. I sometimes wonder if mom would recognize the world we live in today. What would she think about the empty Sears stores? What would she think about ordering something on-line? To her, on-line was where she put her clothes just after she washed them. Would she even believe that a smart phone she could hold in her hand today has more computing power than the Apollo 13 rocket to the moon?

In April of 1989, she and my step-father sold the little house they owned in Florida for \$27,000, fully furnished. Can't imagine doing anything like that today. But back then gas was \$1.08 a gallon, milk was \$2.14 and the average new car cost \$8,243. You had to pay for that car, though, out of your annual income of just \$14,347.

But mom didn't write too much about the technology of the time, or how much things cost back then. She marveled that

telephones no longer had to be wired to the wall, or that you could play solitaire on a computer. But what she was most interested in on a day-to-day basis was what they got to eat and in keeping up with their doctor's appointments. They mowed their grass and planted a garden and went to church. They had saved some money but were not rich by any means. They lived well, though. She and Papa Edmond laughed together, enjoyed each other's kids together, loved each other deeply, and died within just a few months of each other. When it was time to divvy up their remaining belongings there just wasn't much there. They had raised all their kids (her 7 and his 2) up to adulthood. They were all self-sufficient and successful on their own. So they both had done their jobs.

Would mom recognize the world today if she were able to come back for a day? Sure she would. Technology and politics may have changed, but the everyday things we do, the foods we eat, and the emotions we feel are still pretty much the same as it was 30 years ago, or 130 years ago. Human nature doesn't really change.

Money still does what it always did, it gives us the freedom to do things we otherwise couldn't do. It just takes a lot more of it today than it used to.