Short Memories

Going Up?

JOBS WERE hard to get in the 1930s, but my dad, Raymond Lamb always managed to find something. That included a job as an elevator operator in 1935 at the Bank of America Building in San Diego, California.

This was a time when elevators didn't automatically stop at each floor. The operators had to bring them in for a landing at just the right place. If they didn't, the passengers would have to step up or down to get on or off, but Dad was an expert at this.

The tall man at far right in the picture was named Al, I believe, and he was the "starter," directing passengers to the next elevator with available space.

The starter would signal an elevator operator to close his doors and start up. He did this with, of all things, a castanet. I thought that was the most glamorous thing in the world, and I wished that Dad could become a starter just for that reason.

—Gerald L., La Mesa, California

Staying Local…Very Local

MY BROTHER JIM dated a local girl named Helen for more than a year, riding one of our tired, old farm horses 2 miles from our house to hers.

It was purely coincidental that, in 1939, the old mare died the same week Jim asked the girl to marry him. Of course, Jim's neighborhood pals accused him of proposing to Helen only because he had lost his source of transportation.

Our mom and dad borrowed a neighbor's Model A Ford and drove the happy couple 15 miles into the town of Westminster, South

Carolina to get married. The Baptist preacher who performed the marriage was paid a frying-size chicken and a dozen eggs for his services.

After the ceremony, the wedding party set out for home, but not before Mom made Dad stop by the local furniture store to buy the newlyweds a new mattress, since all of ours at home had bedbugs.

Mom had turned one of our bedrooms into a honeymoon suite by installing a lock on the door and giving the bride her best chamber pot. How's that for a romantic beginning?

—Howard A., Roswell, Georgia

Ruled by Murphy's Law

THERE WERE OCCASIONS during the Depression when everyone concerned would be hard put to decide whether to laugh, cry or good-naturedly accept a horrible event.

Around 9 p.m. on New Year's Eve 1932, one of my pop's friends reported that a guy three blocks down the street was selling a freshly distilled batch of first-rate (and, then, illegal) rye whiskey for 50¢ a pint. Of course, the big hurdle facing any celebration was that no one had 50¢.

My pop and his friends, being expert scroungers, found the funds to acquire their pint. Pop, wearing his old overalls, had the only pocket, so he was given the honor of carrying the precious bottle.

The happy quintet was so overjoyed that everyone forgot about some frozen patches of ice formed from the day's melting snow. Right in front of our house, Pop's feet flew up into the air, and he came straight down on the sidewalk, smashing the pint of rye.

To this day, I have never again witnessed five grown men crying at the same time.

—Robert C., Lafayette, Indiana

Model A Recliner

ONCE A WEEK, a patrolman would come to our town of Loup City, Nebraska to issue driver's licenses. It was 1945 when I went to take my written test.

For my road test with the patrolman, I drove my 1928 Model A Ford. We hadn't gone far when the single bolt holding down the passenger seat let loose. The seat fell back, and the patrolman went with it.

Thankfully, the patrolman had a sense of humor, and I got my license.

—Carnelia W., Cheyenne, Wyoming

Irish Won Dad Over

OUR FAMILY PORTRAIT taken in Chicago in 1936 consists of my brother, Robert; me; and our mother, Mabel.

I always thought it was nice of my mother to have a photo made of just her and her two sons. However, in 1997, she explained how the picture evolved.

The day before the appointment, a family friend called and advised my father that he had an extra ticket for Saturday's college football game at Notre Dame. My dad, being a longtime Fighting Irish fan, jumped at the opportunity and went to South Bend, Indiana instead of the photo shoot.

Mother was not pleased about his decision and decided not to cancel the portrait appointment. It took me 60 years to learn the real story behind what I now call the "Where's Daddy?" photo.

—William P., Trumbull, Connecticut

Photo Shoot for a "Star"

WHEN I HEARD that photo booths were coming back in malls,

airports and even homes, I wondered why. Then I remembered I had fallen under their spell as a Thomas Carr Howe High School freshman in Irvington, Indiana, back in 1942.

So I searched until I found my photos, which were taken, I believe, in a Woolworth store somewhere in downtown Indianapolis.

At first glance, I wondered what on Earth possessed me to do this. If the hairdo was not bad enough, my facial expression had progressed from a sultry Lauren Bacall wannabe to a wild-eyed Phyllis Diller.

I remembered the procedure. You put your money in the slot and closed the curtains, and the picture taking began. Of course, at that time, I fantasized about becoming a movie star someday, and when the flashbulbs in the booth went off, I became a star!

—Jo Justice S., Solon Springs, Wisconsin