

FINDING FAVOR

Life Experience

**by
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Before getting personal in this condensed chronicle, join me on memory lane if you lived on planet earth in 1945. Whether you did or didn't, here are some fascinating facts to ponder.

On January 20, Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated for a fourth consecutive term as President of the United States.

Our country's median household income was \$2,595; a gallon of gas averaged 15 cents; and the average cost of a new home was \$4,600. Unemployment was 1.9%, and the inflation rate was 2.27%. The minimum wage was 40 cents per hour. One ounce of gold was worth \$37.25. Wow! How things have changed.

By today's measure, the following grocery prices are unimaginable. Eggs cost 55 cents a dozen; milk 63 cents a gallon; Porterhouse steak 40 cents a pound; and two pounds of apples 23 cents.

At home, Betty Crocker cake mixes, Jell-O salads, molasses cookies and Spam were popular food trends. Slinky was the favorite holiday gift.

Harry S. Truman was *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year." Bess Myerson, representing New York, New York, won the Miss America crown.

The Cleveland Rams were National Football League champs. The Detroit Tigers won the World Series. The Toronto Maple Leafs clinched the Stanley Cup.

Going My Way won six Academy Awards. *Arthur Godfrey Time* began a 27-year run on CBS radio and television, and the public affairs program *Meet the Press* premiered on NBC radio.

Music from the Andrews Sisters, Perry Como, Bing Crosby, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians, and Frank Sinatra could be heard everywhere. Elvis Presley made his first public appearance at age 10.

On October 17, actress Ava Gardner married bandleader Artie Shaw. That was a monumental day for me, too, having nothing to do with them. I was born in New Jersey. Maybe, just maybe, it was soon after that my unique favor-finding journey began.

Imagine being the lone man in a hospital maternity ward, forced to hear screaming soon-to-be-mothers in labor and wailing newborns. Aware of this odd situation, a caring nun with a sense of humor placed me in bed beside this soul for a short time, for comfort I assume.

A lot has happened in the almost 80 years since, in America and in my life. Like the notable people mentioned on the previous page, I, too, had daydreams. Not as grand as theirs, yet just as meaningful. Looking back, I realize doors invisibly marked Destiny were thrust open for me to walk through. But not everything was easy.

An undiagnosed illness in third grade caused the loss of two consecutive, six-week school periods. A helpful classmate became a homework messenger so I could pass into fourth. I did. It wasn't until much later, as a student in our small high school, that things set the stage for future adventures.

Among a long list of activities, I sang and acted in various productions, wrote a column in the school paper, led the marching band as drum majorette, and was a choir member as well as part of a quartet. Micki Harris of the then-popular Shirelles (remember *Mama Said?*) kindly visited my home from hers in Passaic to give the four of us some professional advise. Micki's brother, a lumber yard sales associate, and my father, a carpenter, arranged the meeting.

While still a teenager, I attended a dance in the Shirelles' hometown. Teen idol Fabian was the main attraction. Thrilled at being selected to slow dance with him to a popular Frankie Avalon song, such favor continued even after graduation.

Chosen to be a *Concentration* game show contestant, I ventured alone to New York City, leaving there, however, with only a set of American Tourister luggage. Later, another trip from New Jersey to Manhattan took place while wearing the crown and sash of "Miss Polonia." Perched on top of the back seat of an open-air convertible, a ride down Fifth Avenue during the annual Pulaski Day Parade was followed by a banquet attended by dignitaries at the world-famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Years passed before I contemplated new encounters in Florida where my much-loved grandmother lived.

Like the blazing sun can cook an egg on a hot pavement, my creative juices bubbled to the surface there. Community theater volunteering filled a big void. Singing and dancing as a Kit-Kat girl in *Cabaret* was a definite favorite. Another outlet front runner involved work as a freelance writer.

In addition to having my own newspaper column, I was privileged to write about whatever interested me community-wise, with the editor's always-given approval. Also asked to take certain assignments, I never refused. The gamut included human interest stories, business, real estate and the much-dreaded sports category. Yuck! Talk about a challenge. Lacking knowledge and desire, I anxiously sat on bleachers feigning interest where none existed. Simply being honest here. What did have a deep impact were people I spoke with to report their emotional stories.

My compassion gene reactivated, I accepted a position as a part-time medical assistant, also teaching one evening a week at a local business and medical college. Eventually, the creative bug bit again and a remedy needed. My thoughts veered off in a totally different direction. Entertainment.

To ensure the pictured path was right, I sang with a band at a local nightclub several nights a week. This meant I was a nurse by day, instructor in the evening, vocalist at night, and a basket

case from little sleep the next morning. The routine was grueling, but short-lived. To the shock of Dr. Wolfe who employed me for four years, I resigned for a more unconventional role. I had my reasons.

Peering into the distant future when I would someday be a little old lady, as I am now, I didn't want to wonder, "Why didn't I do that?" So, musical duo Tamara and Regan was birthed.

Forced to fast-track learning lead vocals and harmonies, I arranged a 20-minute audition at a Sheraton. With tightly crossed fingers, I hoped the lounge manager wouldn't ask for more. Twenty minutes worth is all we had! Successful in that short period, a new career began.

Surprisingly, the doctor and his wife came to watch us perform. Could the reason be concern for a possible mental health crisis caused by my uncanny decision? He never said so. Perhaps observing me in action provided proof of sanity and a good decision. Dr. Wolfe wasn't the only one who saw potential. I envisioned growth, prompting the eventual emergence of Tamara's Lovelight on the entertainment scene.

As leader and front vocalist, my professional domain additionally involved agent interaction, promotional materials design, stage presentation, sound checks and more. Oblivious at the time, I later recognized the performer part of me required a split personality.

Acting out Barry Manilow's *Copacabana* lyrics was invigorating. Venturing into the audience to tickle a man's bald head with a bright red, feathered boa equally amusing. But away from the spotlight, a typical comfort zone is quietly sitting at a restaurant's corner table where I can blend into the background, completely unnoticed. And as a party guest, please don't ask me to sing. That will never happen.

Known for versatility, our repertoire contained tunes from 1918, country, Top 40, Broadway

shows, jazz, and George Gershwin's then controversial 1924 *Rhapsody in Blue*. Contracts took us to 24 states and Canada, where I fondly recall eating mouth-watering French pastries at the outdoor cafe of the luxurious hotel in Ontario where we performed. Yum! I returned to America able to speak one French word. Poisson, which means fish.

During a United States show, we were privileged to meet Greg Lake of the progressive rock group Emerson, Lake and Palmer, in town for a concert when he happened to be in our audience. Greg welcomed us to his table, letting us know he was quite impressed with our group's *Nutrocker* rendition done in his honor.

Another invite took us to a bar-be-cue at the home of football player George Nock. Off we went in the large, brown UPS-looking truck we traveled in to join the festivities on our only weekly day off, Sunday. It was always spent together.

Sharing laughs, ups and downs, mutual friends and unfamiliar situations developed a special bond between bandmates. Becoming tourists in the hundreds of cities we performed in was a natural occurrence. I call it "a working vacation."

In bone-chilling Presque Isle, Maine, on our way to a frozen-over Niagara Falls, we performed and stayed in an historic hotel. Imagine my surprise when snow gathered on the indoor window sill in my room. Old glass and wood were no match for the wintry elements. In Saint Louis, Missouri, I did something I never want to do again.

During a downtown jaunt, we noticed a helipad. My keyboard player suggested we all take a first-time helicopter ride. Terrified of heights, I don't know what possessed me to say, "Okay." I probably didn't want my vulnerability exposed. Seated next to the pilot in the clear, bubble-front aircraft, skyscrapers disappeared below us as we passed by, headed towards heaven. I was never so

happy to have my feet on terra firma when we landed. Yet, excitement in and out of booked resorts, hotels, supper clubs, Harrah's Casino and other venues couldn't prevent "living on the road" from running its course. After surviving out of a suitcase for an entire year, a detour was imminent.

This direction happily kept me home where I sang solo for such groups as the Full Gospel Businessmen and the Christian Professional Business Women. I also led worship at church and for a Messianic ministry.

When offered the job of Head of Public Relations for the Museum of Arts and Sciences, I accepted. After that, new endeavors were discovered at radio station WMFJ.

My treasured duties included writing and voicing commercials, as well as hosting a live restaurant review program.....extremely intriguing, to say the least. At my first event, holding a trembling microphone in hand, I nervously tried to interview someone waiting for his meal. I quickly learned from his friend sitting across the table that my target didn't speak any English. Of course, the station's program director on location with me found that hilarious. I was horrified.

At another restaurant, I received a spontaneous marriage proposal from a diner as I questioned him at the buffet table. I didn't accept.

Simultaneously wearing a freelance writer's hat, I continued providing content for a local newspaper and various other publications, most articles accompanied by photos I took. Some advertising copy joined the list. Every so often, unforeseen job perks surfaced.

Like the time I interviewed a young pilot who flew charter flights in a small Cessna. High above New Smyrna Beach, he confidently told me to take control. I did. It was awesome. However, told to land the plane, my firm "No" quickly put the scary task back in his capable, experienced hands.

Though professionally fulfilled, I yearned for the mountain life. Finally, at age 67, beautiful

Murphy, North Carolina, became home.

Fully aware of the value of parents at this age, having lost my father to brain cancer in 1991 (the toughest time in my life up to that point), my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. I brought her here from Florida to live with me. The choice changed all my previous priorities.

Anyone familiar with caregiver challenges understands the stress involved, especially facing frightening situations alone. During that two-year period, my husband remained in Florida to reach his 30-year state retirement. In September 2017, having lived a good life, my mother passed at 96.

Left with cherished memories and free hours, I thought of those who might be forgotten at Christmas. Determined to bring some joy to assisted living residents, I chose a different facility for each of the next seven years. Shopping for and filling bags full of presents was never a chore. Delivering and handing them to recipients proved the adage, "It is far better to give than to receive." The satisfaction gained is indescribable.

Inbetween more recent Yule celebrations, America's ongoing, destructive path produced another useful avenue, creating and distributing thousands of fliers across the country before the last three elections, Presidential and Mid-term. A personal delivery to a local bookstore presented a never-thought-of opportunity.

I was asked to continue making monthly, Scripture-inspired fliers, provided free by me and freely given to store customers. In my third year, this labor of love will continue as long as God allows.

Nowadays, such fervent efforts can be somewhat affected by the acceptable norm defined as "slowly." Undeterred, I move forward, most days with aches and pains, but never without passion, the impetus for this content.

Though proud of another met goal, this very private person feels uneasy. Knowing it will be read by strangers means you know more about me than shared with close friends.

If a special memory was brought to mind, a smile put on your face, your soul stirred by motivation or inspiration, my discomfort is worth it. Looking out the window thinking about this, the daily visiting, 10-member deer herd quietly attracts my attention.

Framed by white window trim, they mimic stationery lawn ornaments, expectantly staring wide-eyed at the back door patiently waiting for it to open. Flanked by vivid yellow jonquils, before long the only visible movement is lip-licking by some in anticipation of a familiar tasty treat. Corn.

It's not without cost, however. They must endure well-meant life and spiritual lessons and notice of impending bad weather. I, too, pay a small price. Whatever I'm doing is stopped to hurry down the stairs to satiate their appetites. Why? Because they found favor.

Before I descend, a softly ticking clock in the background reminds me of uncountable ways similar favor found me. Even now, in the midst of unbound aging, I have hope that fresh ideas will prompt crossing unknown thresholds to enter uncharted territories.

How about you? Have you ever spent time reflecting on the past? What doors swung open to be easily walked through? Which ones were totally unexpected? Which brought more fulfillment than ever imagined?

Life's accomplishments can be large or small. Priorities demanding. Revelatory journeys are usually ignored, so they never happen. I urge you to embark on one.

Maybe your fascinating story will appear in print in the future, and I'll be the one holding it in my hands. I'm always willing to read a heartfelt message. Are you ready? I am.