

Brother, can you spare a dime? Imagine living during the Great Depression of the 1930s when millions of Americans were without jobs. Earl Getz gives an eye witness account of what life was like during that period in our history.

One Family's Journey Through the Great Depression and World War II

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Through  
the Great Depression  
and World War II**



**By Earl Getz**

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ISBN 978-1-60145-486-7

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Printed in the United States of America.

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2008

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## **Back to the Promised Land**

I was barely six months old when my parents made the decision to return to the greener pastures of California. This was a smart move. Not only would work be more plentiful in California, but with so many children in the family, there would not be the large clothing expense associated with cold weather.

The family's move to California would have made good material for a Hollywood script. The folks did not have a car and my father did not know how to drive. Fortunately, my father was pretty ingenious. Where there is a will, there is a way.

A car we had to have if we were going to get to California. Thereupon, a large touring car with canvas top and large plastic windows was purchased. Now all my father had to do was to find a driver willing to endure traveling with a couple with nine kids. Luck would have it a young driver was found who was willing to drive the family to California. At least that's what my parents thought!

There were a lot of loose ends to pull together before the family could start on its long trek to California. One of the most important items my parents did not want to leave behind was the piano. My mother had this piano since she was a little girl and therefore did not want to part with it. Moreover, my father would have been lost without a piano. Hardly a week went by without him sitting at the piano and playing his favorite hymns.

Once in a great while my mother sat down at the piano to play some of her favorite songs. Most times she had to be encouraged to sit at the piano and play. For the third time, that piano was shipped across the country. Along with the piano, needed furniture had to be shipped. Then there were kitchen items, clothing, and books. My father was not about to leave his books behind. His books were from college days and doing a lot of reading was one of his hobbies, even if he had read them before.

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Finally the day arrived to head west. March was not exactly the best time to travel across country by car. To top it off, roads were not what they are today. Needless to say, the car was not heated. In those days heaters in cars were considered a luxury item. The plastic windows did little more than keep out the wind and rain. Dad used a couple of apple boxes to compliment the back seating. Fortunately for me, I had my mother's lap to sit on.

From all accounts, the first part of the trip did not go as smoothly as my folks would have liked. By the time the family reached Amarillo, Texas, the hired hand had had enough and decided to leave the pack. At least that is one story. Another story has it that my father let the driver go because he did not like how he was flirting with my older sisters. The incident left the family without a driver.

There is noting like on-the-spot learning. My father was an individual who could improvise quite well. He decided there was no better time to learn to drive, even if this meant driving the car all the way to Albuquerque in second gear! At this point, my father had no knowledge of how the gear shift worked. How was he to know which gear was which?

Before leaving Amarillo, an interesting episode happened to my mother. The family was staying at a motel just outside of Amarillo. My fparents decided that my mother would go to town to do a little grocery shopping while my father stayed with my siblings. My mother then left to do the shopping and took me along. I'm not sure if the means of public transportation at that time was by streetcar or bus. It seems to me my mother always mentioned a streetcar.

Everything went fine until my mother wanted to return to the motel. There was one problem. She could not remember how to get back and forgot to write down the address before leaving the motel. She did remember which streetcar she used.

Fortunately, as is so often the case, there were people willing and ready to lend a hand when the need arose. The help came by way of the conductor who generously offered his help. My mother was an individual who could get very nervous when she was in trouble. But that good conductor saw my mother's



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nervousness and reached out to help her. (The other passengers had left by this time.) He asked my mother to describe the neighborhood. As they rolled along he would ask her, "Does this look like it?" This went on for a little while, and before long he got my mother back to the place from whence she came.

## **On the Road Again**

After leaving Albuquerque, my father decided to swing south to connect with Highway 60, where the weather would be a little warmer. Being a new driver, he wanted to avoid the dangerous curves through the Black Mountains on Route 66.

Traveling on Route 60 brought the family through Tucson, Arizona. My mother liked this town so much and would have stayed there had she been able to talk my father into it. Contrary to her wishes, his sights were on California, and California it would be.

My parents had no idea where we would live once we arrived in California. They decided on a town called Belvedere Gardens. One of the first things my parents did when arriving in Belvedere Gardens was to contact a Lutheran Church. Through the help of St. John's Lutheran Church, the folks very quickly rented a house at 4444 Eugene Street in Belvedere Gardens.

Belvedere Gardens in the 1920s and 1930s was little more than a suburb outside the city limits of Los Angeles. What used to be a rural setting is now ringed by the San Bernardino, Pomona, Long Beach, and Santa Ana freeways. In the era of the 1930s, Belvedere Gardens was surrounded by cow pastures and Japanese farms. Today Belvedere Garden is called East Los Angeles.

I admire the courage my parents had for such an undertaking as moving across the country with such a large family. What my parents had going for them was that they were very religious people. They put their faith and trust in God that He would see them through that long and difficult journey. See them through, He did! Few families today would make the journey across country with nine kids in the car; let alone in a touring car with drafty plastic windows. With all my religious

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convictions, I am not sure I would have had the courage to travel across country with nine children as my parents did.

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