

Aging Grace-fully while living at the Market

By JESSICA RONGITSCH, M.D.

I am fortunate to take care of several residents of Heritage House in the Market, an assisted living facility next to the clinic annex.



For this month's article, my patient, Grace, invited me up to her tidy room to share her memories and her wisdom with me.

Grace, how old are you?

I'm 99. I was born in November

1905.

Where were you born?

I was born in Green Lake, at home. My family had a nice house; a nice yard, with cherry trees.

We were just down the street from the Green Lake Library. My sisters and I practically lived there. I used to think there wouldn't be any books left to read when we were grown ups because we would have read them all. The librarian, Mrs. Cole, was a big influence on me. I read that she passed away some years ago, and I wished I had let her know that before she died. What a big influence she was.

What do you remember about growing up?

I remember the kerosene lamps we used for lights; and that all of us kids used to get our baths in a round tub in the kitchen. My mother would heat up the water on the wood stove and

pour it into the tub. I remember the ice wagon that would come down the street every few days – clomp, clomp, clomp. People would come out and chip off a chunk of ice to put in their iceboxes, to keep their food cold, because we didn't have refrigerators back then.

Then, when electricity came in, well, we were all so surprised!

I remember going to the Pike Market. My parents would take us to the livery stable in Green Lake and get two horses and a wagon. They'd put us all in there and go to the Market. There weren't that many stores back then.

There was a place called Brehms, that had big pans of peanut butter and pickles. I remember my mother would bring this big old ugly root to a man on the street and he would grind it up, and my mother would collect it in a jar. That was horseradish.

I remember wagons coming in and unloading chickens that were squawking. I used to wonder what people did with them. I guess they'd buy them and bring them home for eggs, or to eat. Pretty soon farmers started coming with carrots and vegetables. There was a buttermilk shop. I also remember a young Indian girl who was always there. She had no teeth but the prettiest smile. She used to sit on the street and weave baskets. I always have remembered her and wondered what happened to her.

You must have watched the Market change quite a bit over the years?

Oh yes. Then in the 1930's, I used to take my two little boys to the Market. At that time street fare was a nickel.

You mean parking?

No the streetcar. We lived in a house in Columbia City, and we used to take the street car down Rainier, down Jackson and walk

down First Avenue. My boys and I used to go to a place called Mannings, where soup was a nickel; it's hard to believe. We'd get our soup and go sit down and look out at the water and love the Market so. I remember, back then the only shop on the waterfront was the Curiosity Shop, and now look at it.

Then, sometimes, when I could come up with 25 cents apiece, my kids and I would go to a place called the Alley Cat Cafe, on First and Union. A man stood behind the counter and he would cook, take the money, and do puzzles and tricks with my sons. Sometimes he'd give them an extra piece of fish. We were all hungry back then. It was the Depression.

How did you manage to support your kids?

I worked for 26 years at Seattle Quilt on First Avenue. I was walking by one day, and a man was outside sweeping the sidewalk. I told him I needed a job, so he brought his sister out. They looked me over and one of them commented that I 'wasn't very strong.' But they hired me anyway.

They taught me to work a power machine and I sewed sleeping bags and down garmets. It wasn't much money, but it was a steady paycheck and that was the important thing. That was right off of Skid Road.

You mean Yesler?

Yes. Skid Road was fun. Food was cheap. It was full of 25-cent hotels. Little old men would stay there and people who were down and out, but you felt safe.

What else do you remember about the Market?

Well the 1970's it was 'Save the Market' with Victor Steinbrueck. They were selling tiles that went in to make the floor of the Market, to

raise money. The tiles were \$35 apiece but I bought two of them; one for each of my sons.

That must have been a lot of money back then.

Yes it sure was, but it was worth it. Now my grandkids ask about the tiles, and want to know where they are. I don't know and I suppose it would be nearly impossible to look up, but it makes me feel good to know they're there somewhere. I have always liked the Market and my kids liked the Market. It was a big part of our lives. And now here I am, living in the Market. I never would have dreamed it.

What do you think of the Market now?

I think it's wonderful. The crowds are terrific. It is the highpoint of Seattle. So many people think it's just fish throwing, but it's more. There are wonderful stores two, three stories down – old coins, and newspapers, lots of interesting shops.

Do you get out to the Market very often anymore?

Not so much. About a year ago, I made it up to Steinbrueck Park, but I think that's the last time I've been out. I'm just content living here and being near it. Allison [Grace's friend] explains new stores to me. Like the cheese store. I like to hear about it. The last time I was there, I inched my way along and stopped and looked at all the beautiful apples piled up, and I thought about how far its come.

What's the most important thing you've learned in your 99 1/2 years?

Have a good attitude; no negative attitude. You don't have to be a Pollyanna, but find something good.

What's the secret to your longevity?

I think hard work. I did work awful hard to

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