

We The People

Program 111

Reflecting on a Century



Depending on your point of view one hundred years is a long time. In geological time it's nothing but in human terms it's a century and a lot can change. Recently Australian identical twins Flora Barrett and Winifred Hopes celebrated their 100th birthday having been born in 1913 in Western Australia. Both are well and still have enough breath to blow out their birthday candles. When asked what their secret to longevity was they said "*don't smoke, don't drink and don't go out with bad men*" and both claim to have some good years left yet. It's quite an achievement to have lived 100 years let alone as twin sisters.

Now I reflected on this unique event for some time and wondered what had transpired in their life time and what they might say of the world today. What memories do they have and is the world a better place for those one hundred years. Let's reflect for a moment on what Flora and Winifred have witnessed.....in 1913 Australia introduced the first national bank notes of 10 shillings and 1, 5 and 10 pound notes and Joseph Cook became Australia's 6th Prime Minister. In Denmark the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen was finished while in Germany the world's first fertilizer plant is opened to help feed the world. In New York, Grand Central Station is launched while in Death Valley the temperature hits 135 degrees Fahrenheit and the first automobile highway across the USA is built called the Lincoln Highway. In December 1913 Arthur Wynnes new game called *word cross* is published in New York and is today's cross word puzzle. It was the year the Panama Canal opened and Charlie Chaplin started his film career.

The fighting has never stopped in those 100 hundred years punctuated by WW1 and 2, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The atomic bomb was invented and used while Albert Einstein was awarded the Nobel Peace prize for Physics and his historical and profound general theory of Relativity and the world's most famous equation, $E = MC^2$. In literary time Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby*, D.H. Lawrence wrote *Sons and Lovers*, Tolkien penned *Lord of the Rings* and Margaret Mitchell conceived *Gone with the Wind*. The Muslims declared Salmon Rushdie should be killed because of his book, *Satanic Verses* while Biblical writings passed the 3,500 year anniversary mark with a yearly print run of 30 million today. It can easily claim to be the world's best seller. Science has mapped the human genome and sent man to the moon and robots to Mars and beyond. Modern medicine has achieved quantum leaps and the digital world has changed the way we do most things with computers the size of a coin.

Evil prevailed in many parts with Hitler responsible for 34 million deaths, Chairman Mao for 40 million and Stalin for 20 million. These murders were supplemented by Pol Pot, Hirohito, Saddam Hussein, Mussolini and Tito just to name a few. In contrast Mother Teresa, Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, Helen Keller, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Aung San Suu Kyi, Billy Graham and many others balanced the scales of morality. The last hundred years have been the most turbulent on record. It was a century of profound upheaval and change. It was a century which showed man plumb to his lowest depths yet also gave opportunity for some people to offer an example of profound values, courage and integrity. It's been 100 years of great challenges and economic and social vandalism where the earth for the first time is in peril of environmental collapse. It's been a century of profound courage and infinite greed and the Western Australian twins Flora and Winifred could never have imagined so much would change in their life time. They have seen the horse drawn carriage to jet air travel and from machines that think and do the work of a thousand men. They have seen drugs abduct mankind to fill a moral chasm and a justice system which sits only for the rich.

I imagine the question on the centenarian's lips is; what will the next hundred years be like as the earth's populations soars and God is jettisoned from the lives of many. Then again they may not be worried and just take each day as it comes. Perhaps Flora and Winifred have nearly completed their task having lived a good life and raised 15 children, bearing 36 grandchildren, 72 great grand children and 19 great-great grandchildren. I sense they are at peace with themselves but want a better world than the present and a much better world than their great lineage will inherit. In the end that's up to us, *we the people*.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley