

Those Good Old Winters--Phooey

By BEN MAIDENBURG

How many of you like to think back to the Winter seasons of the days gone by?

The nostalgic Winter-dreamers of yesterday are like old soldiers. When they were being shot at, they grumbled and complained and found fault with everything from shoes to helmets, from MacArthur to the private in the orderly room.

The war over, these old soldiers sit around and recall the war days with a glow that would make you think they'd enjoyed every minute of it.



EVERY TIME I walk into our well-mortgaged house, and hear the hum of the gas-furnace blower, I revel in the luxury.

When I get into a cold car early in the morning, and in a few minutes am all warmed up by its heater, and entertained by its radio, I feel there's nothing wrong with the world.

Four decades or more ago, things weren't so spiffy. I was a boy, then, out in Marion, Ind.—where Winters were Winters, and not these cream-puff affairs we have around here anymore. Something's happened to Winter—even out in Indiana.



BY THANKSGIVING Day, 40 years ago, we had snow which drifted so high the whole barnside was covered up to the roof, and we were digging tunnels and igloos "just like the Eskimos."

By then, a hefty supply of smoky coal had been loaded into the coal shed, which stood beside the barn.

By Thanksgiving, my father had loaded the area above the barn with hay, and alongside the stall where lived our noble horse, there were bales of straw.

Maybe the house isn't built for Chanel No. 5, but to me there isn't anything so wonderful a scent as a barn in the morning.



IN THOSE days, my mother would go through all sorts of arguments getting one of the four boys to haul in the coal in buckets, and many was the day when you had to literally cut it from the pile.

The roof leaked, and the water would freeze the coal into a solid mass.

We had a cooking stove in the kitchen, and another, fancy one with a pot-belly, in the living room, and before one of these stoves we'd both dress and undress.

I don't recall that any of us had any pajamas. We slept in the woolen underwear, the kind with the button-up behind.

I wish I had a dollar for every time I came up with a blistered bottom from leaning too close to the stove.



IN THE evenings, we'd sit around the stove and parch corn swiped from the horse. It was a big deal.

There was no radio, no television and rather little visiting. If you had to go a distance, you just didn't go—rather than leave

the poor horse standing out there in the frigid air.

They didn't have any comic books then, either. So you either dreamed, or talked or read and re-read the school books.

Everything was wonderful—then—until there was a call of nature, and you had to go out back. It took a brave person to make the trip.

Not only was it freezing cold, but it was dark—who in our income bracket had electric lights in the outhouse? Certainly nothing like today with a magazine rack alongside.



IN THOSE days the Smoke Abatement League would have had its oxygen cut off

in a hurry. Every house had one or two chimneys, from which smoke poured in vast quantities.

The pure, white, driven snow the poets wrote about must have been in their imagination, or else at the top of the Alps.

Around Marion the snow was white for a few moments, after which it took on a sooty crust that was nothing about which to be poetic.



IT DIDN'T happen in the Wintertime, but another thing I remember well is one day when I had an altercation with my brother Milt. Seems that he had been given a savings bank, built in the form of the Liberty Bell.

Well, the Liberty Bell has a crack in it, and the bank which gave the thing to my brother, had a "crack" etched into the model.

I was playing with the Bell-bank, and dropped it and Milt saw, for the first time apparently, the "crack." He accused me of breaking his bank, and the fight was on.

It ended—after several hours—with him picking up a stone from the gravel street in front of our house and letting it fly with such accuracy that I still wear a scar on my head.

I bled quite a bit, and decided to "fix" him. I sat there and bled till Mom came and told her what Milt had done to me.

My get-even-with-Milt plan worked in reverse. Mom first bandaged the cut, and then paddled me to a fare-thee-well for being so dumb as to sit there and "nearly bleed to death."

He DID Break That Bell!

IN THE Sunday, (Nov. 22) issue of the Beacon Journal there appeared a feature article "Those Good Old Winters—Phooley" by Ben Maidenburg. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this piece of nostalgia, particularly since I was a member of the same household.

I can also attest to the accuracy of the writer's memory.

THAT IS, up to the point of the last section of the article, in which he repeats an old canard that I've been hearing about at least twice a year for the past quarter of a century. This alleged incident concerned a savings bank in the shape of a Liberty Bell, and I was charged with accus-

ing my brother of having cracked the bell, when all the time it was only the simulated crack of the original bell.

I think perhaps the writer is himself a bit cracked on this episode and I should like a retraction as I feel that I am being held up to ridicule.

IN THE same issue you write glowingly of another man's brother Milt—President Eisenhower's. You have nothing but glowing praise for him, and I felt the comparison would influence the reader to think that this Milt was indeed a dumb bunny.

Sincerely,

MILTON MAIDENBERG
Marion, Ind.

P. S. He **did** break my Liberty Bell! He did!