

MY GENERATION

I read in the paper a few weeks ago that the last World War I veteran in the United States has died. Frank Woodruff Buckles was 110 years old...my age. He was only sixteen when he lied about his age to join the army in 1917. The second-oldest known WWI veteran died in 2008 in Austria. As far as anyone on earth knows, I am the only man of my generation left.

I know I'm not a man and that I'm just one of many vampires, some of whom are eons older than me, but having married a human brings things closer to home, I suppose. Possibly my last human contemporary in the U.S. has passed. It's like the opposite of one's birthday—one's last possible "death" day. I'm not particularly nostalgic about the days of my youth, since I was changed so young. I went to school, which had just become compulsory; read the first book series written for children (my favorite being Tom Swift); joined the Boy Scouts of America when it was a new organization; dreamed of becoming a soldier; and that was the extent of my human life, really.

It was Esme who introduced me to the popular culture of my generation. She was born only six years before me, so we are of the same era. Before her first marriage, she had cultivated an interest in music, but had never roamed far from her home town in Ohio. After she joined our family, Esme took steps to get us involved in art and culture...and to get us out of the house for fun more often.

Carlisle had been working long hours at the local hospital in Ashland, Wisconsin, and I'd enrolled in the city's high school. We spent much of our free time together talking about medicine. I was becoming interested in his profession by constant exposure to it. I also had bought a piano with which to amuse myself when alone.

My human mother had made sure I took piano lessons as a boy, and I played a fair bit as entertainment for my parents and their guests in our front parlor in Chicago. As a vampire, I explored the expanded

possibilities for musical artistry enabled by my change. My hands and brain worked so much faster that I could make the one instrument sound like four or five. Composing became a passion of mine, as I explored the limits of my new capabilities. Esme adored my piano playing, and encouraged me to expand my classical repertoire with the latest jazz and ragtime music.

Esme also bought a Gramophone and some records, and ordered Arthur Murray's new mail-order dancing lessons. The package contained footprints drawn on paper, denoting the steps of the popular dances of the day. We attached the papers to the floor, and then learned to dance step-by-step following the numbered footprints. She, Carlisle, and I quickly mastered the waltz, the foxtrot, and the Charleston.

The three of us attended town-hall dances in the 1920s, and after we moved to the east coast, Esme signed us up for lessons at one of the new Arthur Murray ballroom-dancing schools. She got so good that she was offered, and accepted, a teaching post. She became known for always wearing gloves, a practice she adopted to prevent the students from noticing the chilly temperature of her hands. She had to stop teaching because too many male students became enamored of her and a number of them tried following her home after classes. Her beauty, grace, and sweet vampire's scent attracted them to her like flies. For a time, Carlisle or I had to escort her whenever she left the house.

We took in the latest technological rage, the moving picture show. Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and Charlie Chaplin were popular stars of the era and when the latter made The Gold Rush in 1925, we were delighted with the Little Tramp. In 1927, we rushed to the theater along with everyone else to see the first "talkie," called The Jazz Singer.

There were vaudeville shows, occasional visits to speakeasies (where we, of course, did not drink the illegal alcohol, but rather danced), and at home, we listened to the vaudeville stars who had adapted their stage shows to the radio wireless. Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen, as well as Abbott and Costello, and Milton Berle entertained us with their creative wit. Sports events like the World Series also were broadcast on the radio wireless, as was the news and politics of the day.

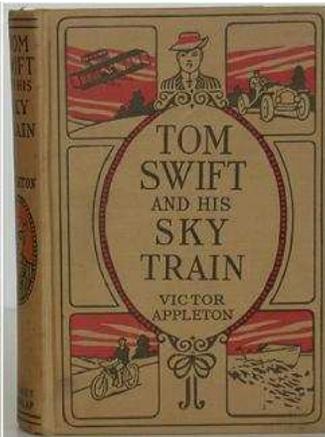
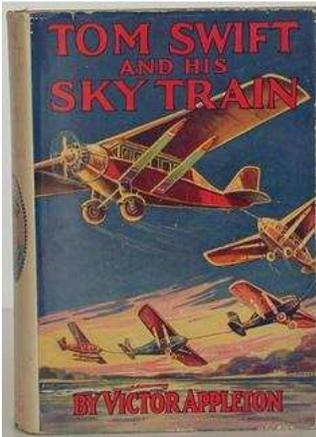
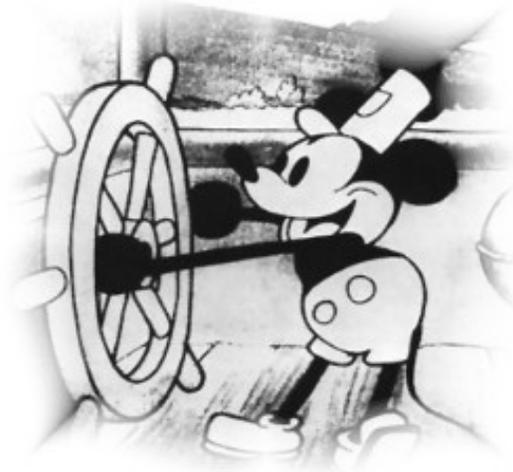
Automobiles had been around for a while, but became popular only after Henry Ford started mass producing them in Michigan. Carlisle bought a Model T, which we often took out for joy rides, followed by its modernized version, the Model A. When the faster and sleeker Chevrolets became available, Carlisle traded up. Though we could run faster than the automobiles of the time, the novelty and thrill of the “driving machine” turned us into auto fanatics.

I saw the first scheduled television programs in 1928 and the birth of Mickey Mouse in the same year. When the Great Depression hit in 1929, Carlisle’s fortune diminished along with everyone else’s. Though we were not speculators in the market, the value of our family’s holdings took a dive. Unlike other Americans, though, we had no trouble recouping our losses. In the early 1930s, after returning from my independent sojourn away from Carlisle and Esme, I became a medical doctor on paper and, though I did not enjoy philanthropic contact with humans, I helped Carlisle from time to time with his house calls and non-invasive procedures, and saw first-hand the miracle of sulfa drugs and penicillin. If either had been available in 1918, the Spanish Influenza pandemic could have been abridged, or perhaps thwarted altogether.

Now that the last American of my generation has died, I feel an obligation to record some of what we experienced outside of the war and the epidemic that overshadowed our youths. There were many innovations of that era that remain favorite pastimes of the Cullen family to this day...music, dancing, broadcast entertainment, sports, and fast cars. Carlisle and I have Esme to thank for lifting us from the isolation of our studious natures and bringing some joy and light into our lives.

Edward

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