

CRASH COURSE NUMBER 1929  
by Muriel Harrison

Any narrative stands on a tripod, thus: PLOT, the Great Depression; CHARACTERS, family and friends; SETTING, Hiram, Ohio.

Tom Brokaw called us World War Two people the Greatest Generation, but nobody I knew felt "great." Although I was a Depression kid, seven when the market crashed, I never went hungry or homeless. Where, then, is the life changing, career molding, theory making experience? Of course! It is the unpredictable path of leaps and pot holes my journey through education has taken.

The stock market crash cost my grandfather his job as a watchman and my Dad as a die maker. My grandparents traded their three story house in Cleveland for a thirty acre farm north of Hiram, and our lives were never the same!

When I was five, one aunt taught me the Charleston, and another taught me how to read -- which I did so well that half way through first grade I was skipped into second grade.

In the summer of 1930 we moved to Hiram. I was halfway through third grade and Principal Hadsell did not want to put me back in third, so he had me read aloud and put me in fourth grade. That year the fourth grade tested as high as the fifth grade on Every Pupil Tests, so they skipped all fourteen of us into sixth grade.

AXIOMS ONE, TWO, AND THREE: You can learn as well in big city schools and small towns; in classrooms and from family; and in traditional and experimental Programs.

My Grandparents farm was a whole new world. Six of the eight siblings came with families, food, and presents on Christmas Day. I had been there two days already learning about coal oil lamps, well water, wood/coal cook stoves, outhouse, cows, horses, chickens and the wonders of farm life. As I grew, I realized that my grandparents had given up electricity, natural gas, city water, sewers, telephone, radio, coal furnace, and a street car stop at the corner to cope with the depression.

AXIOM FOUR: Do your best with what you have NOW!

## SAGES

By the time I was ten, my extended family had taught me to drive a team of horses, milk a cow, ride the potato planter, gather eggs, churn butter, help feed thrashers, can produce from the garden, and make hay and cider. I didn't realize that all that fun was educational!

An artist and his pianist wife lived across the road and brought their Pippin apples to help make cider. They had lived in Paris in the twenties where three miscarriages left her emotionally damaged, but I was welcome. She had a mother of pearl opera glasses on the window sill for bird watching, he raised veggies for Crane's Canary Cottage in Chagrin Falls, and their Collie named Delsey greeted me and smiled.

The house we rented in Hiram had been called Tiffany Hall when James A. Garfield lived there as a student. How many people do you know who lived over three years in a house where a U. S. President once lived?

Dr. Kenyon, who developed the phonetic alphabet (look in the front of your dictionary) lived around the corner, and sometimes rode to Cleveland with my Dad who was working there then. Dad would drop him off at Western Reserve University to visit with his colleagues, who would take him to the train station in the afternoon to board the train for Garrettsville. There somebody would drive him home in the "station wagon". Did you know that was how those "woodies" got the station wagon name?

We moved to Northfield and then Maple Heights to be closer to my Dad's work. I was always involved in activities and on the honor rolls, graduating June 6, 1938 with honors at fifteen.

Transylvania University in Lexington, Ky. offered me a full scholarship, but I couldn't accept because we didn't have enough money to cover board and books. I returned to high school and studied English Lit, physics, solid geometry and trig, and worked half days in the office.

When my aunt told a Hiram housemother my plight, she said, "Tell your niece to check out Fenn College. Florence Evans, a Hiram grad, teaches drama there."

I did and went to Fenn on a scholarship and co-op work. Our small liberal arts freshman class had the best Friday afternoons! Every week we went to a government, business, industrial, or special location, plus a spring weekend at Ford's Dearborn plants and Greenfield Village.

My co-op jobs took me to Cleveland Graphics<sup>e</sup> Bronze, county bd of ed and detention home, a publicity agency, several offices including guidance at Fern where I learn<sup>ed</sup> to be a test administrator. I have a bracelet with eight keys I earned in activities, including magazine editor and student council president.

**AXIOMS FIVE, SIX, AND SEVEN:** Always have a Plan B; most people are helpful; and students are not stamped out with a cookie cutter.

All these experiences taught me a basic Snow Flake Theory: Just as no two snow flakes have the same pattern, neither do any two people. And conversely, just as all snow flakes are made of frozen water crystals, so do all people have the same aims, needs, and dreams -- of peace, safety, belonging, productivity, and contentment. This is the scaffolding of my life -- a depression kid who not only survived, but flourished.

I would be remiss to omit two exceptions. When my tenth grade home room teacher found out I really was only thirteen and had skipped two grades, he said, "They should never have done that. It could damage your social skills."

Second, we stopped at Hiram College one afternoon to get information. The man in the office asked my age and graduation date. When I told him I was fifteen and would graduate in two months, he asked, "How can that be? My daughter is fifteen and in tenth grade."

As I explained how it happened, he turned cold and distant. Then he turned to my Dad and said he would need a ten dollar matriculation fee.

My Dad said he didn't have ten dollars to spare at the time. The man stood up, looked at us and said, "If you don't have ten dollars now you won't have tuition in September," and walked out of the room.

I was humiliated by that man's behavior.

**AXIOM EIGHT:** No one in education should hurt people. Read the job description.

It's like teaching a puppy. First, you have to know more than the pup!