

THE HISTORY OF MAXINE RONEY LUNDGREN

by
Nancy Mair

To find a person who has lived in Kansas his or her entire life may be a rare thing. But, maybe it isn't so rare, because most people who were born in Kansas, or have lived there for some time period, truly love it, and many who leave eventually return. Those who have never been to Kansas might have the outsider's stereotypical image of a flat and boring place. But talk to a person who has lived there and a vision of a beautiful place emerges.

For about fifteen years I have known an interesting and wonderful woman who is one of those rare finds. She was born in Kansas, has lived her entire life in Kansas, and plans to stay for the rest of her life. She is 92 years old.

Maxine Roney Lundgren was born November 25, 1910 in Marquette, Kansas. Both of her parents were born in Kansas and her two sisters were also born in this small Kansas town. Her husband was born in Minneapolis, Kansas and both of their children were born in Salina, Kansas. This is certainly a Kansas family!

Maxine attended grade school and her first year of high school in Marquette. Her family moved to Minneapolis, Kansas after her freshman year. She met her husband in high school while she was a sophomore and he was a senior. She and Pete Lundgren married in 1927 while she was still in high school. They went to McPherson, Kansas, to get married in the minister's home, with Pete's favorite aunt and uncle as witnesses. Maxine remembers that the church bells were ringing at 8:00 when they walked up the porch. They spent the night in McPherson, then headed back to Minneapolis, where they lived with Maxine's parents.

After Maxine's graduation from high school in 1928, her father found a better job in Salina. She and Pete moved with the family to

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Salina, where her father worked as a meat cutter and Pete worked for the newspaper as a linotype operator.

Maxine and Pete remained in Salina for several years. Their daughters were born there—Ann in 1929 and Jan in 1939. In 1943 Pete took a job with the state Labor Department and moved to Kansas City, Kansas. Later he was relocated to Topeka where he served as State Labor Commissioner. Pete was drafted during World War II and served in the military.

Patterns of women's participation in the workplace have varied over the centuries. Women have traditionally done the domestic work, and as the years progressed they often learned a trade, such as dressmaking, and owned shops to support themselves or help contribute to the family income. Many women worked only in the home until the war, when they joined the workforce. Maxine's life followed this pattern. Taking care of Pete and the children was a full time job. When Pete went off to the service, she joined the work force to add to the family's income and to help pass the time. Her sisters worked as waitresses at the Kansas Hotel in Topeka and they talked her into coming in and helping out. Maxine said she "didn't know beans about being a waitress," but her sisters taught her everything she needed to know. She said it helped pass the time and it was fun. Her mother watched the two girls while she worked. At that time Maxine, her parents, her two sisters, and her two daughters were all living together in a two bedroom, one bathroom home. Perhaps she went to work to get a little privacy! She continued to work there for about a year. Pete was gone for 18 months. When he returned, they bought an apartment complex and Pete ran a printing company in the garage. Maxine was a proofreader for his company and helped run the complex.

The climate in Kansas is a much-studied topic. It seems there is never a dull moment. Anyone who has lived in the area, even for a short time, knows exactly how dynamic an area this is in terms of weather and climate. However, Plains dwellers accept these extremes as a part of normal life. Tornadoes are often what stick out in the minds of people from this area. As a child, Maxine remembers being terrified of tornadoes. Her mother was petrified of them and with good reason. In 1905, five years before Maxine was born, her grandparents were killed

in a tornado in Marquette. The violent storm tore apart their new 10-room home. Her grandparents' bodies were found in a hedge tree and Maxine's uncle, who was nine months old at the time, was found alive in his mother's arms. Maxine's mother was hit by the falling chimney, which broke her leg. I'm sure this story has been told many times over the years.

Maxine remembers stories of another big tornado. She was on the road when it happened, but she remembers that her aunt broke her back and was in the hospital for a year. Finally, she remembers one that happened when they lived in Topeka. She said they were pretty lucky in that it just knocked out a lot of windows in the apartment building, but everything around them looked like a war zone.

Another common Kansas occurrence is drought. Maxine recalls long periods without any rain. She does not remember it being anything disastrous personally as they were not farmers and never had any trouble getting water. The only personal water issue she experienced was when she and her husband bought a lake house and had to drill a well. Pete did it with a post hole driller and she said that was a sight to see!

The extreme heat of the summer and the extreme cold of the winter are just what Kansans are used to. To keep cool in the summer, Maxine said they used fans. She remembers a day that topped out at 120 degrees. They occasionally used blocks of ice to help, but she said they didn't think too much about it, they were just used to being hot. She does recall that the summers of 1935 and 1936 were pretty bad.

To keep warm in the winter they had a coal furnace. A truck would bring the coal to their home and shovel it in through the windows in the basement. Some of the winters were very cold and they didn't think anything at all about it dropping to zero and below. They had to walk to school – not quite a mile – and they just bundled up. Every once in a while they would close the school due to the weather. Probably not half as often as they do today!

Ask ten different people what major issues affected their lives and you are likely to get ten different answers. However, depending on the generation you are asking, you will probably find similar events dominate their answers. When I asked Maxine about the significant issues in her life, the events of World War I, World War II and the Depression came to mind, as they do for many people of this generation.

Maxine was only eight years old when WWI started. Although she was just a young girl, she said the war left a very deep impression on her. She had a couple of uncles who had to go away and her mother cried and worried. Fortunately, one of her uncles was stationed in Washington and the other in Texas and neither ever had to go overseas. She remembers that many men never came back.

She also talks about the Depression. Surprisingly, since most stories of the Depression describe the struggles and hard times, she recalls that it did not change their lives too terribly much. Her husband had a good job the entire time. She said that \$40 a week was a great salary back then. Her father and Pete's father were out of work, however.

World War II was another major event for her. She said they had to do without many things. There were rations and stamps for things such as sugar and coffee. Pete had to go into the service for 18 months. Maxine's mother and father came to live with her and helped take care of the children, while Maxine worked.

The Dust Bowl was an event that touched everyone who lived in Kansas. Maxine lived in Salina at the time. Walking outside resulted in being covered with a layer of dust. The dust came all day and all night and Maxine's daughter remembers wearing cloths over their faces. A girl who lived next door, she recalls, was playing outside and the next day she died. In spite of all this, people they knew didn't move. They stayed put and just dealt with this just like they dealt with everything else Mother Nature served them.

With all the conveniences that we have now, it is really hard to imagine living without the ones that we think of as basic. To talk with someone who has lived through all the inventions of the last century really puts it in perspective. Maxine was eight years old when they got electricity. This was a big event for them. Up until then, they had to burn kerosene lamps for lighting. They got inside plumbing when she was ten. Most of us really can't imagine living without this! They had to go outside in the freezing weather to go to the bathroom. Think about having to wait for your bath water to heat up on the stove. And we think computers were a neat invention!

Her first television in the 1950s was an RCA. Prior to that, entertainment came from the radio that they got in the late 1920s. Before

that it was the Victrola and the player piano. She does always remember having a telephone, but says they had to share the lines, better known as “party lines.”

Their automobiles of choice were Fords and Chevys. They had two cars most of the time. She especially remembers their 1953 gold convertible Cadillac.

Pete and Maxine always loved the water. They built their first lake house in 1933 outside of Salina. Pete’s dad and granddad built it out of native rock. This was a fun weekend and summer vacation home. Their second lake house was at Lake Wabaunsee and they bought this in 1968. Their three grandchildren loved to spend their summers here with their grandparents fishing, swimming and exploring. Eventually, they sold their Topeka apartment complex and made the lake house their primary home. Pete loved this area and wrote a book about the history of Lake Wabaunsee (it was a prison camp in WWII), and also wrote a song about the lake.

Pete passed away in 1985, before I met Maxine. I understand he was just as wonderful as Maxine is, and his death was truly a great loss to the entire family. Maxine remained at the lake for several years after Pete’s death. She now lives in Overland Park, Kansas, where she is near her daughter Ann, her three grandchildren, and their families.

We can learn much from this generation. Sure, we can learn all about history in school, read about it in the books and even on the Internet, but there is nothing like hearing the personal stories to truly understand the meaning of history and in this case, the true meaning of living in the wonderful state of Kansas.