The State of the Economy in 1947

How We Survived the Winter

MAXINE HEBERT

When I hear about how bad the economy is right now, it makes me think of the first winter in our new house in Jasper Place. My Dad had just returned from England after WWII, and with his gratuities Mom and Dad bought a new house in Jasper Place, as well as furniture for it. We were very proud of our new house even though it lacked electricity and water. Heat was supplied by a coal and wood stove, but we were all happy. As we moved in during the summer, late July I think, there wasn't time to plant a garden, but my Mom got some vegetables from my Grandfather's garden to make some pickles, can some vegetables and, of course, make up jams and jellies.

My dad was a house painter and he got a job with a construction company painting houses, and things looked pretty good for us. Then after Christmas the inevitable happened: work had closed down for my dad because of the cold weather and we were obviously in trouble. There was no money left for the Veterans as it had all been depleted during the War. In those days I doubt if there was Unemployment Insurance, or if there was, Dad probably didn't have enough stamps to get any help. My dad made arrangements with the man that had built our house to waive the house payments. He would work the next summer after hours and on weekends painting houses for him, so that worked out OK, but we still had to eat.

My mother was a crafty woman, and she had two beautiful cake plates with embossed flowers on them, so she decided we would make plaques to make a few dollars. She bought a bag a Plaster-of-Paris, some pots of paints, brushes and some decals. Every night after the supper table was cleared off, we would start mixing the Plaster-of-Paris. To this day, I still remember the smell of it.

Then, we would pour it into the plate, and after an hour or so when it was almost set up, we would set bent hairpins into the back for hangers. We also had some small soup bowls and we would fill four of them also. Then we would get out the ones that had been made the night before and we would paint the front of the larger plaques with white paint and the smaller ones with pastel coloured paints. The ones that had been painted the night before were my job to do. I learned how to paint the roses and leaves very carefully on the large plaques with the coloured paint and not let it run. I had very steady hands, so I did a good job. The smaller ones that were painted pastel were decaled either with little flowers, little animals, birds or butterflies, and were very cute. I loved to slide the decal off the backing and onto the plaque. Then, once a week, we would load them into boxes on my sleigh and go house-to-house selling our handiwork. The large plaques were 25 cents, and the smaller ones two for 25 cents. I was having a ball with all this; I thought it was great fun.

One evening, about 25 years ago, my husband and I went to play cards at a friend's house in Jasper Place. His mother had passed on, and Homer and his wife had moved into her house. I looked on the kitchen wall and hanging there was one of the plaques we had made. I was amazed. Now I wish I had had the nerve enough to ask if I could have it, but I didn't. A friend of mine who works at St. Vincent DePaul is keeping an eye out for me just in case one of the plaques comes in to them. If, by any chance, any of you reading this article happens to have one in your belongings, you would make an old lady very happy if you would let me know. You can contact me via this paper at (780) 757-0993, or via my daughter, Michele at gardening@thespurr.ca.

This is how we got through our depressed State of the Economy in 1947, by making plaques. It kept our stomachs full, and has given me good memories, and I am sure they brightened up quite a few walls in Jasper Place.

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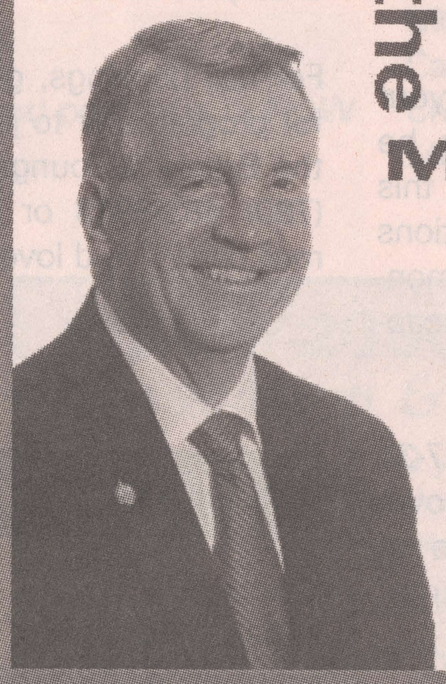

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