

SENIOR SCAPE: Remember the '50s?

By Sylvia Dickens

What do you remember from the '50s? Watching black and white television shows that focused on the family, good living and cowboys or wearing scratchy crinolines, poodle skirts and black and white saddle shoes? Did you have the ones with the buckles on the back?

Or perhaps you wore high waisted cleanly pressed and pleated slacks, upturned collars and Brylcreemed hair. Did you wear penny loafers? They were quite the rage then, too.

Dances were popular. Young adults danced to the likes of Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra. The trumpets, clarinets and oboes created an unforgettable sound that easily triggers nostalgia in those who enjoyed that era.

Maybe you were a car fanatic who couldn't wait to drive your hot rod to the burger bar and compare it with those of your friends. If you weren't, you probably saw this main attraction on a Saturday night of guys standing around the parking lot, car hoods upraised and rock and roll blaring from within.

Those were the days, weren't they? Remember sputnik? Did you watch the skies that night looking for that one white light as it streaked across the heavens? We've come a long way since then.

Through the week, the entire family enjoyed Dr. Kildaire or Ben Casey, Lassie and Father Knows Best. Saturday mornings, kids flocked to the television to watch Robin Hood outwit the Sheriff of Nottingham one more time. Others caught the westerns: Have Gun Will Travel, Rawhide, Wagon Train, Gene Autry, Annie Oakley, Hopalong Cassidy or Cisco Kid. Remember the Roy Rogers Show? What a thrill to see him perform with Bullet and Trigger and his wife Dale Evans on Buttermilk. Did you catch them at the CNE?

In the evening, the big attractions were the talent shows and heart-warming and fun shows like the Andy Hardy series, or I Love Lucy and her crazy antics.

Weekends when money was available, it was time to take in a movie suitable for the entire family. Back then, movie studios made a lot of musical extravaganzas, in which women wore beautiful brightly colored, sequined flowing gowns and ostrich plumes.

Sparkles abounded. Men donned long tails and top hats. The eye-appealing dance girls lined long winding staircases while the main performers danced up and down the slowly-turning stairs.

Song and dance was always a hit. We'd often see Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers or Gene Kelly and any number of dance partners break into song. Funny that there seldom were other people around at the time.

Did you believe that people really spontaneously danced in the streets? Some of us did. The recent introduction of flash mobs, where people gather suddenly in a public place to perform a type of group entertainment, could be just what we need today.

Then in 1954, someone invented Cinemascope which opened the door for wider-screen movies like Brigadoon and Knights of the Round Table. And who can forget the epics like Ben Hur for which the studio hired over 10,000 extras. It was one of the most expensive movies ever made. MGM couldn't afford to do another one like it.

Remember the Elvis Presley boycott? He caused quite an uproar. Ed Sullivan was one of the few brave hosts who agreed to let him perform on his show. There was one stipulation, though. Elvis could only be shot from the waist up. Quite a change from what is allowed today.

Perhaps such censorship isn't so bad after all.

The '50s era was different in so many ways. Entertainment showed the kinder side of the human race, when people had time to be polite and respectful. Most kids wouldn't dare swear or talk back to grownups. Programs were calming. They made you smile, a welcome break from the struggles of living.

Dancing is for everyone

The good news is that some things that were popular in the '50s still can be enjoyed today.

You don't have to be a Fred Astaire or a Ginger Rogers to go dancing. Why not add a bit of playfulness to your life and do it in the park?

Ok, maybe you're a bit hesitant to dance at the park, but that doesn't mean you can't have some fun. Dig deep into your closet for your dancing gear. The Aurora Seniors Association is holding a Black Tie Gala Dance and Dinner on May 9. Doors open at 5.30 p.m. with dinner at 6.30 and dancing until 10.30 p.m. Tickets are on sale until May 2. Members pay \$25; non-members \$30.

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre, drop by 90 John West Way, visit www.auroraseniors.ca, email auroraseniors@rogers.com or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.