

This is the time of year when many people spend a lot of time talking about muddy roads. Some residents of this rural area, where dirt roads are the rule, are often upset by mud on their automobiles and chatter bumps and holes in the road. Others look back several decades and put the subject in a little different perspective.

My mother began teaching school in the Depression year of 1932. Unlike many young girls who presided over the one-room country schools of the time, she did not "board" with a family in the district. She taught the Burdell #7, or Wadle, school. She lived in the same township, although nearly kitty corner across Burdell. Since she had the use of a Model T Ford, she drove from her home south of the village to her job in the northwest corner of the township. While driving to school allowed her to live at home, the car, road, and weather provided some new challenges.

The black Model T coupe, in the first place, was not equipped with a starter. It required hand cranking to get the engine going. First, the driver "set the spark" with the lever on the steering column. The throttle lever was there, too, and the driver adjusted that, as well. Then, she positioned herself in front of the Model T, pulled the choke wire, and spun the crank until the car started. Usually, it would continue to run until the driver was able to get back into the car. If not, she had to repeat the procedure. All too often, the engine died just as she climbed back into the automobile. Sometimes, she was lucky enough to have a passenger, as several young men were working in the area and were glad to crank in exchange for a ride.

The Main Road usually didn't present many difficulties. The road was graveled, and it was maintained, at least minimally, both summer and winter. She had a mile, though, after leaving the Main Road, that specialized in offering the unexpected to travelers. During the spring and the fall, the clay road was deeply rutted. If there were no other cars or any horse-drawn conveyances on the mile, things were pretty calm.

On the rare occasions when she met another car, someone had to get out of the track. It usually depended on which car had the best place to pull off out of the way. Once, meeting a farmer in the neighborhood

who was hauling a load of logs with a team of mules, the maneuvering became a little trickier. This took place during the spring of the year when the clay ruts were especially deep. She stopped to let him by, but he--the perfect gentleman--motioned her on. She proceeded through the mud, staying in the tracks and not daring to stop. She slipped by that load of hay, but, a little farther down the road, she noticed that the driver's side of the Ford was festooned with enough hay to feed a couple of horses.

Any eighteen year old girl, as my mother was that year in the thirties, starting out to teach school, do the janitor work in the building, pump water, and deal with special needs of her students, including two boys who suffered from hemophilia, had to have a little raw nerve. The fact that my mother had eight brothers and no sisters probably helped provide her with the necessary grit.

Driving the Model T took some of the same spirit. The difference between 1932 and the present can be nicely summed up by one little story. Once, starting the car in the schoolyard took about six tries. She finally got the car going, jumped into the vehicle, pushed in the "reverse" pedal, and, exasperated, backed up in a real hurry. The Model T, with the spare tire on the back, hit a big popple tree squarely. Everything seemed to be all right, the tire having provided a nice cushion. Once back home, she took a good look at the spare. The inner tube had a big bulge, about the side of a baseball, protruding from between the rim and the tire. Always, it was life on the brink of disaster, a common theme during the Great Depression of the 1930s.