

According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (eleventh edition) one of the meanings of "anomaly" is: "something different, abnormal, peculiar, not easily classified." I pondered this as I sat drinking coffee this afternoon, pausing now and again to dunk my animal cracker in the liquid. Was this an anomaly? It might seem normal for a child to dip one of these little bland cracker/cookies in her milk, and it is not uncommon for an adult to dunk a hard cookie of a more sophisticated nature in coffee, but an animal cracker? That seemed a little strange, even to me, especially since I don't drink a lot of coffee and never dunk anything in it. But, today, for some reason, a little coffee to give the animal cracker some character seemed just right.

That led to thoughts of all kinds of oddities and how so much depends on "where and when." If I dressed in the typical farm woman's attire of the 19th century, it would surely seem peculiar, but not as peculiar as a woman of that era wearing jeans and sweatshirt in public.

Food habits that are outside the norm can seem very strange. There was a family I remember when I was growing up whose children appeared to exist on cold, uncooked hot dogs and soda pop. We wondered what would happen to them on such a diet, but—surprise!—they lived to become adults. I can't say they had lives of normal length, however, but I don't know how much nutrition played a role.

Years ago, it would have seemed strange if peanut butter were banned from school. Everybody ate it, and I can't remember anyone having an allergic reaction. That is unthinkable today.

And the gluten-free diet—for anyone not having the serious actual celiac disease—that would have been an anomaly as little as twenty years ago. Yet, today, there is a gluten free alternative to almost every traditionally grain-based item of food.

Seeing a person over ten years old without a smart phone in his hand seems anomalous today. Only we confirmed Luddites make sure we spend our days and evenings unconnected. It is now so common to see a couple in a restaurant sitting across from each other, not speaking, each absorbed in something on a phone, that conversation may be well on its way to becoming an anomaly.

With school libraries often renamed "media centers," it appears that actually reading books—the kind made of paper—is, for many, a thing of the past. E-books probably aren't read that much either, for certainly, there are online synopses of anything a student may want to know.

Will television become an anomaly? It has been so many years since we have had a TV that I have no clue if people actually watch the programs that come on week after week or not.

Much of what we, in our household, consider a normal lifestyle seems peculiar to many people these days. Although small houses have been given a lot of press during the past few years, many of our acquaintances can't quite understand our living in a one room cabin. Living far from the road, eating mostly food we have grown organically, spending evenings with board games and books—these ways seem strange to many. And, maybe they are.

And yet, if getting along without many of the encumbrances of the average American's life seems a contradiction—the desk with the computer stands next to the woodburning cookstove, after all, and the electric lights illuminate the old striking clock with the Roman numerals— it is just another indication that the “anomaly” is still a normal part of a society. What is unusual today may well be the norm for the future. Or, in an odd twist, what was common years ago and rare today may well return for another reign of popularity down the road a few decades. We are, after all, a strange bunch, we people who occupy this planet.