

Happy birthday, Warren

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"I believe that I must have a guardian angel, because everything meshes -- it's not coincidental. As far as luck is concerned, forget it -- I don't have any luck. I don't need it."

That's how Townshend resident Warren Patrick -- who turns 102 today -- sums up his good health into his long life.

"I feel excellent. I keep active," he told reporter Mike Faher during a recent interview, before adding: "A day like this, if you weren't coming, I'd be outside."

Over the years, Mr. Patrick has become one of this editorial board's favorite regular contributors to the Opinions Page, his "I remember when ..." letters some of the most well-read in the Reformer.

It's almost overwhelming to think about summing up such a long and rich life in this space. So, instead, we'd rather offer some of our favorite anecdotes that Mr. Patrick has offered us, through his letters, over the years.

On downtown: "I remember when ... Horse drawn wagons were a common sight in cities. ... About once a week, the housewife would hear a bell jingling and she would know that the vegetable wagon or the fruit wagon was coming down her street. ... In the summer, the children especially, waited to hear the bell of the ice cream man. His horse usually had a bell attached to the harness and that was easily recognized by boys and girls. They would tease their parents for a nickel because, with that nickel, they could buy a good-sized ice cream cone."

On cars: "I remember when ... In 1928, when I was in high school, there were 21 different makes of cars on the road. My first car was a Model T Ford Roadster. This car had a fold-down top and a "rumble" seat. ... This was an open car with glass only in the windshield. Shifting was done with foot pedals. Two for change of gears and one for braking. There was no self-starter. The car had to be cranked. This was my first car which my brother bought for \$25."

On toilets: "I remember when ... Many homes had no flush toilet. ... The toilet consisted of a small room with a wooden bench running against one wall. In the bench were usually three holes. Two for adults and one smaller for children. Beneath this toilet a pit was dug in the dirt to contain the toilet waste. In hot weather it was the custom to sprinkle lye or some other powder to ward off flies and other insects. For paper, it was usually from a Sears & Roebuck or Montgomery Ward catalogue. When the dirt pit was filled, one could hire men to come and clean it out by shoveling the waste into their wagon."

On entertainment: "I remember when ... Endurance contests were popular in New England. ... Dancing was another endurance contest. A number of couples would dance together in a large hall. Music would be supplied by record playing or by radio. Spectators sometimes would line the walls."

On the luxury of ice: "I remember when ... Refrigerators were called ice boxes. Most people didn't have

electricity. Therefore, keeping perishable food any length of time was a problem. If you lived in a house with a cellar, people often stored food there for a short time. If that was not an option, an ice box was necessary. ... Ice men regularly drove the streets with a horse drawn wagon loaded with large pieces of ice."

On growing old: "(O)ld age is a gift to be treasured. I am now, probably for the first time in my life, the person I have always wanted to be. ... I am very aware of that guy looking back at me from the mirror. But I don't agonize over it very long. I am what I am. I would never trade my body or my life experiences, my loving family or my loyal friends for anything.

"As I have aged, I have become more kind to myself. I've become my own friend. I don't chide myself for eating that extra cookie or having a banana split. ... I am entitled to being a little messy, a bit extravagant, to eat some things that perhaps I shouldn't. I have seen too many friends leave this world before they understood the great freedom that comes with aging. ... I will play a joke or tell a funny story for a laugh which helps everyone forget their troubles for a moment. If I wish, I will recall precious times spent with my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren. Young people may think I am an old fogey, but they, too, will grow old.

"I am so blessed to have lived long enough to have my hair, what there is of it, turn gray and to have laughs etched into my face as wrinkles. So many have died before their hair turned grey and they missed the pleasure of growing old. I count my blessings every day and thank my God for the Guardian Angel sent to watch over me. My prayer is that your God will be with you, too, and likewise you will fully enjoy his blessings."

Happy birthday, Warren. May you have many more days of happiness and good health ahead.