

Ken's Korner

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THOSE GUYS???

By Ken Garrison

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Back in the early 1930's when summertime came around, I was a happy barefoot kid who played in the streets of south central Los Angeles. Life was fun, the sun was warm, and I wasn't thinking about much beyond today. Those were indeed simpler days -- but without realizing it at the time, I was about to be a witness in the coming years to a sequence of unexpected but recallable events. There were changes ahead that a barefoot kid and boy growing to manhood couldn't foresee.

Now remember, I said "recallable events" -- not *earth-shattering* ones.

Let's look at the first one of these that I can recall. When I was growing up there was an old man who roamed the streets of my neighborhood in a horse-drawn wagon, yelling in a forlorn monolog: "Rags, bottles, tires, newspapers..." He was the Junkman. As a kid, I assumed there would always be a Junkman. Today there are no street-vending Junkmen.

Then there was the Iceman. He drove his truck by your house looking for the card your Mom put in the window that signaled that she wanted a 25-, 35-, or 50-pound block of ice for your ice box. If you happened to be around the house when the delivery was made, you begged the Iceman to chip off a couple of little chunks of ice from the block so you could have some to suck on in the hot noon day sun. Today we have refrigerators (with all sorts of doors and bells and whistles). Today there are no Icemen.

Remember the Good Humor Man. Jingle-Jingle-Jingle-Jingle went the bells on the truck to signal his arrival. If you were lucky enough to have a nickel or dime, or successful in your pleas to Mom or Dad -- you wound up with an ice cream bar or popsicle. But today, at least not in our neighborhood, there's no Good Humor or Ice Cream Man.

Time went by, and so did my youth -- but the same pattern continued. There is no Helmsman with his unique whistle to announce the arrival of the Helms Truck with its unique drawers filled with breads, cakes and donuts. There's no Milkman regularly depositing your order of milk and dairy products on your front porch. There are no home delivery Milkmen.

So what's my point in all this? Well, I've outlined the disappearance over my lifetime of people and their occupations that I just simply took for granted. When they were "there," they were expected -- but now they are gone.

And now there is another "endangered" species -- The Mailman -- at least as we know him or her.

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) recently announced its plans to close 3,700 post offices. USPS lost \$8.5 Billion in 2010 and \$2.2 Billion last quarter. Snail Mail challenges Internet Email for business and private citizen correspondence traffic and transactions. Fed Ex and UPS are competitive, efficient, and hungry entrepreneurs in transporting and delivering bulk packages and goods. It is a tough landscape for USPS.

I don't know. As I look back at what's happened since I was a barefoot kid, it is hard to see how the institution of The Mailman can survive. What will it do in the face of progress and technology? I wasn't around at the time, but the Pony Express didn't last forever, either...

