

Interview with Marta Hiatt

Author of Remembrances of Times Past: A Nostalgic Collection of Personal Stories and Photographs Recalling the Way Life Was in the Early Part of the Twentieth Century

Reader Views would like to welcome Marta Hiatt, author of “Remembrances of Times Past: A Nostalgic Collection of Personal Stories and Photographs Recalling the Way Life Was in the Early Part of the Twentieth Century.” Marta is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

Juanita: Thanks for joining us today Marta. Would you please tell readers what they can expect from your new book “Remembrances of Times Past”?

Marta: I’m pleased to talk with you Juanita. “Remembrances of Times Past” is a fun “trip down memory-lane” for people born in the first half of the Twentieth Century and, for those who are younger, it will provide some surprising insights into the way life was for their parents and grandparents.

Juanita: What inspired you to write “Remembrances of Times Past”?

Marta: My sister and I were reminiscing one day about how we used to have to spend almost all day Saturday helping mom pull the wash through a wringer several times to get the water out. What a chore! We also discussed how we had to make soap suds to do the dishes in the days before detergent was invented. We put the hard bar of soap in a small wire grate and swished it around for 10 minutes or so to get enough suds. After our talk I thought it would be interesting to put together an entire book about the so-called “good old days” by asking friends and family to contribute their stories.

Juanita: What is the time frame? Do you encompass the whole 20th Century, or just a segment?

Marta: It focuses on the first half of the century, particularly the ‘40s and ‘50s, but also a little on the latter half. And of course it doesn’t encompass every event, but only those that I acquired personal stories about. I didn’t want this to be a boring history book, but an entertaining recollection of people’s real-life experiences.

Juanita: It must have been a very interesting process compiling the stories and photographs. How did you go about researching information?

Marta: I started with my family, and then asked everyone I knew about their experiences when growing up, and sometimes I even questioned strangers when it was the right circumstance. And, as I mentioned in the book, I got a lot of stories from the magazine “Reminisce” which is entirely written by the subscribers. I wrote the contributors and asked if I could use their stories and photos in my book and they were all happy to do so.

Juanita: How many stories do you include in “Remembrances of Times Past”?

Marta: There are about 200 stories but many of them are just short vignettes that can be read in a minute or two, and they are interspersed with photographs and commentary, making it easy to read.

Juanita: How do you separate the stories? What are the names of some of the chapters?

Marta: They’re separated into 12 chapters:

LIFESTYLE: From Uptight Conformity to “Let it All Hang Out”

SEX and SOCIAL MORES: From Victorian Prudishness to Personal Vibrators

HOUSEHOLD: Wives Don’t Wear Aprons Anymore

THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT

FASHION: From Glamour to Grunge

UNDERSTANDING YOUR MIND and SAVING YOUR SOUL: From Freud to Falwell

HI HO, HI HO, It’s Off to Work We Go;

HEALTH: Doctors Don’t Make House Calls Anymore

SCIENCE and TECHNOLOGY: Hal and His Pals;

WOMEN: You’ve Come a Long Way Baby

GETTING THERE: From Horse and Buggy to Outer Space

POTPOURRI of CHANGES; a variety of changes that have been made during the century.

Juanita: Marta, you also include incredible photos that truly capture the image of the times. How many are in your book, and where did you find these great pictures?

Marta: There are a total of 250 photos and they were accumulated from various sources. I started with my own family albums and chose a few from there, some came from the Web, and I solicited photos from friends who contributed their stories and finally from people who sent photos to Reminisce Magazine along with their stories.

Juanita: Were there many surprises? What were some things/stories that you found particularly interesting?

Marta: I guess the biggest surprise is that people today look back in longing to the “good old days,” when life seemed much simpler and we didn’t have to deal with traffic and phone trees and spam on our computers, and so forth. But actually life before World War II was very harsh. Most people were

poor, they lived on farms and everyone, including the children, had to work from sunup to sundown. And they had no electricity or phones or even indoor plumbing. It was a tough life.

I enjoyed the stories about the telephone from the time people had “party lines,” which they shared with neighbors or even relatives, so they could listen in if they had a mind to, anonymously of course. People did a lot of snooping and gossiping under that arrangement and I couldn’t imagine having a system like that today!

I also found interesting the stories about how much the proper etiquette controlled people’s lives, such as having to wear a hat and white gloves everywhere you went, and being uptight about making any kind of social faux pas.

Juanita: There were many inventions in the 20th Century. What were some of the most significant?

Marta: The most significant were probably in transportation: cars and planes which opened up our country. And then in the latter half of the century we had computers and the Internet, which enabled instantaneous communication with the entire world. TV would be in there too, bringing us news of the world every morning and evening, instead of going to the local movie theatre on Saturdays to see what happened a week before, as I did when I was a kid. Of course the invention of computers depended on what was invented before them: transistors and microprocessors, which vastly shrunk electronic equipment.

Other significant discoveries were in the health field, such as the discovery of DNA, penicillin and other antibiotics, vaccines, which wiped out polio and other childhood diseases, all the way up to organ transplants.

Juanita: What were some of the defining cultural changes?

Marta: Probably the biggest cultural change has been the status of women, who were “allowed” to vote in 1920. But they didn’t make too much progress after that, and were still considered subservient to men.

After the feminist revival in the ‘70s, triggered by Betty Freidan’s book “The Feminine Mystique,” women gained a lot of freedom, and gradually achieved equality with men, although there’s still a long way to go, although now we’re even talking about the possibility of a woman president. The Pill, which was introduced in 1960, gave women sexual freedom and control over the number of children they wanted to have.

Another major cultural change was the “hippie” revolution of the ‘60s. We went from being a very uptight society governed by religion and the rules of etiquette, to anything goes, and “do your own thing.” This generation changed our entire culture.--From corsets to Wonder Bras, from bathing suits that covered a woman’s entire torso, to bikinis, and from button-down white shirts at work to “casual Fridays.”

Juanita: Typically referred to as “the good old days,” do you think the modern times we live in are really that much more difficult than other era’s of the 20th Century?

Marta: They’re difficult in a different way. I think our world is becoming increasing more stressful and putting tremendous pressure on people. Traffic is one of the biggest problems: long commutes and people sitting in their cars for 2 to 3 hours every day breathing carbon monoxide, and then finding there’s no place to park when they arrive.

We also suffer from two types of pollution: the decrease in our air quality and the constant noise we’re exposed to. And there’s the little things that stress people: phone trees and never being able to reach a person; potholes; people yacking on cell phones; watching TV news that’s often about wars and murders, and the increase in crime. We went from never locking our doors to dead bolts and burglar alarms.

Juanita: Why do you think it is important to reflect back on this part of our history?

Marta: Recalling these events gives us a wider viewpoint on today’s problems and a better understanding of how our grandparents lived. The 20th Century was the most amazing one in history from the standpoint of the technological discoveries that have made our live so much easier – from indoor plumbing to email messages there were enormous changes!

Juanita: How will your book change the way people look at their own lives today?

Marta: I think it will help put today’s problems more into perspective, realizing that people who lived before the “age of information” had simpler but harsher lives, and it’s all one long process of evolution.

Juanita: Who do you envision reading your book? Who would enjoy it?

Marta: Older people will enjoy reminiscing on the way things were when they were children and younger people will get more insight into how their parents and grandparents lived. It’s a fun and enlightening book for every age.

Juanita: Marta, what do you want readers to ultimately understand by reading “Remembrances of Times Past”?

Marta: That every age has its hardships, they’re just a different kind. And that, in just a hundred years, mankind made tremendous progress, taking us from traveling by horse and buggy, to flying all the way to the moon! It makes one wonder what we have to look forward to in the next 100 years.

Juanita: Marta, please tell us about your other books, and how can readers find out more about you and your endeavors?

Marta: I have a doctorate in psychology and had a private practice for 25 years, and many of the stories in my book came from my clients. I'm also the author of "Mind Magic, Techniques for Transforming Your Life," published by Llewellyn, and "Inspirational Quotations From the Concept-Therapy Philosophy." My publisher's web site is Northernstarpress.com, where my books can be purchased, and also at Amazon and in bookstores. I'm now retired and living in Southern California, currently working on a book about the 7 laws of the universe and their application in our daily lives.

Juanita: Thanks for talking with us today Marta. You've taken us on a nostalgic trip down "memory lane" with your new book "Remembrances of Times Past." Do you have any last thought for your readers today?

Marta: I'd like to close this interview with the statement President Clinton made in 1996 when he said "What an amazing century it has been! America became the world's mightiest industrial power, saved the world from tyranny in two world wars and a long cold war and, time and again, reached across the globe to millions who longed for the blessings of liberty."

Indeed, what an amazing century it was! I'm glad I had the opportunity to live most of it, and I hope my readers will enjoy this "sentimental journey" or, for those born in the latter half of the century, learn how different life was for your parents and grandparents.