



## Exercise one way to feel younger



Can you remember where you were and what you did in the 1920s and 1930s? Perhaps you were a young child growing up or maybe just a “thought” in the making — part of a family to be. Many immigrants traveling to the United States in the early 1900s came with high hopes of making a better life for themselves.

The 1920s were an explosive decade. The first public radio station opened in Pittsburgh; the Model T rolled off the assembly line; airplanes transported mail for the first time; men’s belts replaced suspenders; and flappers wore knee length dresses. Duke Ellington and Charlie Chaplin rose to popularity along with “talking pictures”. The average annual income was about \$1,000, the average cost of a house was \$4,000 and milk was 28 cents a gallon. The average life expectancy was 53.6 years (men) and 54.6 years (women). Hearing aides, antibiotics and insulin were introduced. This was a time of prosperity that led to the Stock Market crash of 1929 and subsequently, the Great Depression. Life was not always easy.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak to a couple whose parents came from Poland and settled in McKeesport in the early 1900s. This couple is my Aunt Cecila (Sarah) Zajdel Mols (83 Years) and Uncle Joseph Stanley Mols (90 Years). I was interested in their view of life then and now. I particularly wanted to gain insight as to what keeps them going.

Uncle Joe was the third child of eight; Aunt Sarah was the ninth out of 11. Both grew up with parents who spoke Polish and little English. As children, they had many responsibilities and had to work around their school and play time. Uncle Joe’s mom died at a very young age and he learned to be very independent. Enjoying building things and being active as a teenager, he worked various jobs to buy a Ford car (\$50) to share with his brothers. Aunt Sarah helped to maintain the family farm with responsibilities like weeding the garden and taking care of the cows and chickens. They met at a church dance. Aunt Sarah was the coat check girl. Uncle Joe came with his friends to the dance. After three years in England during World War II, Uncle Joe came home. They were married and later raised two children.

I asked my uncle what exercise was like when he grew up. He told me, “As children we really didn’t have ‘exercise’; we would run around the block and play baseball at the field. We didn’t sit around. We were always doing something. We didn’t call it exercise. We also just worked hard.” Aunt Sarah talked about playing a game where you would put a stick on the curb at the corner, someone would hit it and then you would run to each corner — a sort of baseball. Also, they had to walk everywhere. Cars and bicycles were hard to come by. They stressed, “Exercise is much different today. People are busy, life is fast.” Today, both of them walk the treadmill and ride the stationary bicycle for 20 minutes each day. Their doctor encouraged them to exercise to stay fit and strong after both of them had cardiac bypasses about seven years ago. When their old treadmill broke, their family bought them a new one. I asked Uncle Joe, “Do you feel guilty when you don’t exercise?” and he told me, “Of course”. Aunt Sarah, though, said, “No, I don’t feel guilty. Sometimes I am too busy cooking, cleaning and doing other things.” When asked, “Why do you exercise?” Uncle Joe responded, “It helps me stay in shape. When I get up, I have pain all over my body. After I exercise, the pain disappears.” While saying the rosary, he also walks in a circle within his home one to five times a day. His fear of falling and the bad condition of the sidewalks prevents him from walking outside.

When asked, “Do you feel younger?” Both answered yes.

Their advice on living a healthy life: Keep yourself busy, eat healthy, and exercise.

Remember: always check with your Doctor before you begin an exercise program.

*This column was written by Constance Mols Bayles, PhD, Program Director of the Center for Healthy Aging. For more information on this article, please call 412383-2367*

*CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Centers for Disease Control. For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit [www.healthyaging.pitt.edu](http://www.healthyaging.pitt.edu).*