

A drop of water falls from the end of an icicle that formed on a storage shed at Libertyville High School earlier this month.

Diary highlights how teens' lives have changed in past 100 years

The other day I struck up a conversation with a fellow who, it turns out, is a reader of this column.

Not only that, he told me his 13-year-old daughter Rebecca also reads this column, which surprised me. Thirteen-year-olds reading the newspaper seems a bit of a rarity these days.

The conversation put me in mind of another teenager, who lived in Lake County more than 100 years ago — Irene Rockenbach of Deerfield.

The reason we know about Irene a century later is because she kept a diary, one volume of which, written in 1898 when Irene was 15, is in the museum's Lake County History archives.

Some of what Irene recorded could be written by today's teenagers: "Went to school as always. Emma and I wore our class colors today ... we were scolded more than ever for whispering in class."

Other entries are evidence of just how different a teenager's life was in 1898 compared with 2008.

Consider this entry written in May: "I wore my thin dress and straw hat today for the first time." Wow, what a difference from the piles and piles of garments that most people own these days. Irene probably had three dresses: one for winter, one for summer (the "thin" dress of this entry) and perhaps one for Sunday best.

A few entries on, she describes the following: "At recess we decorated ourselves with crab-apple



COURTESY OF THE LAKE COUNTY DISCOVERY MUSEUM
This is a photo of Irene Rockenbach, who lived in Deerfield and wrote about her life in a diary 100 years ago.

blossoms. I took some lilacs and star flowers to school for teacher. Our lilies-of-the-valley are open and lovely. Roses will be here for Decoration Day."

Irene writes about flowers quite a bit; about picking them — almost every day in spring and summer — and about her aesthetic relationship with them. She writes about sitting under the crab-apple trees to read or study, and about bringing flowers to the minister to decorate the church.

My own son Jackson is

nearly 13. And while he does have chores, the amount of work Irene writes about, cheerfully I might add, is stunning in light of what is expected of my son. Irene writes about getting up every day at "6:30 o'clock" and doing her "work," including churning butter, cleaning, mending, washing and cooking. And that's before studying, which she reports taking two or three hours each day. Irene studies botany, history, physical geography, literature (in the spring of 1898 she was read-

ing Sir Walter Scott), arithmetic, as well as writing "compositions" and memorizing "pieces" for recitation.

What is perhaps most striking in Irene's diary is her long and detailed record of the American involvement in the Spanish American War: "I read the war news after supper. The War with Spain has begun. The first shot was fired at 7:10 a.m. yesterday morning by the Nashville, who [sic] captured the Spanish merchant ship Buenos Ventura. The President has called for 125,000 men. The Havana and Cuban ports are blockaded by American vessels. Emma said if she were old enough she would go; and I agreed with her."

There are entries about picnics and "school entertainments," parties and christenings, weddings and visiting neighbors. Irene's life and the lives Rebecca or my son or any Lake County teenager have points of similarity and points of difference.

Maybe the key idea in all this is for today's kids to also keep diaries, so that it will be known 100 years from now how life has changed — in ways we can only imagine.

• *Katherine Hamilton-Smith is the director of cultural resources for the Lake County Forest Preserve District. The Lake County Discovery Museum, on Route 176, west of Fairfield Road near Wauconda, is open from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday. Call (847) 968-3400.*

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The good news from the study showed that of Americans (53 percent) library in the last year problems. The most is that young adults (olds) was the group most likely to use the future. Librarians have about this information since they grew up. There's even some of age group, born after ally rewired their brains multitasking and going to problem solving worked hard to incorporate of technology into strategy must be wo

Some survey results. People who do not or have slow dial-up were less successful finding needed information group requires special libraries and agencies Security or Medicare

Conversely, those net-savvy expect greater information and services on the Internet to a degree than it is getting today.

This is the dilemma right now: serving the love the good old-fashioned with books, magazines and also those who DVDs, recorded books net access.

One of our tech-savvy North Suburban Librarians me recently that we used to "constant" means ever-changing contain errors. Correcting involves a constant requires accepting a change with it.

Maybe I just have and do the best I can and getting the right my life. The good news is that most people information they needed ally.

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