

# You and Your Cooperative: Growing Up Together

By Ashley Thacker, Sequatchie County High School

“Mom, why did we have to pick today to clean out Grandma’s house?”

“Because we only have one week to get everything put up for sale. Why don’t you start with the closets? That shouldn’t be too hard.”

“Mom, you know I have a history test tomorrow at school. I really don’t have time for this.”

“Just help me for one hour and I’ll let you be on your way.”

“Fine, but only for one hour, not a minute longer. It’s already three o’clock.”

Julie reluctantly made her way to the hallway closet while Mom headed for the bedroom. She opened the door and saw boxes stacked all the way to the ceiling.

Julie tugged at the first box on the upper shelf. All of a sudden the side of the box tore and an abundance of magazines fell on top of Julie’s head.

“Oh, that felt real good.” she said facetiously, “Mom, can you help me? I’m swimming in magazines.”

“Give me just a minute,” hollered Mom.

“What would she want with all these old *Tennessee Magazines*?” Julie mumbled to herself.

“O.K. honey, I’ll help now. What were you saying?”

“I was just wondering why Grandma would have kept all these magazines for so long. We’ve been getting these magazines at our house ever since I can remember. Look, here’s one all the way back from May 1959.”

Julie skimmed through it and said. “Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Holtcamp showing off their *all new electric home*. Why are they making such a big deal out of it? Hasn’t everyone had electricity since about, uh...1930?”

“Some people had electricity. Others were waiting. However, having electricity and having electric appliances were two different things. Your grandmother grew up with a wood stove, not an electric range or water heater.

“Well,” Julie said, “That still doesn’t explain why she kept the magazines.”

“The magazines show the progress that the co-op and the community have made. See, our community was big enough for an appliance store. But, if you don’t have any appliances that need electricity then you don’t need the electricity. However, the electric co-op’s offered electric appliances for sale. In this magazine here, there are ads like this one; “buy a Rapidayton Twin Champion Water Heater.”

Mom picked up one magazine after the other. Flipping through them she explained, “See, after electricity was brought to homes, people were curious about how electricity worked, so they bought as many electric appliances that they could. These magazines eventually started to put recipes in them so people could cook using electricity.”



**Ashley Thacker, daughter of Keith and Sherry Grayson and Andy Thacker was the winner of a \$2000 college scholarship as the first place winner in the State-wide Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association Washington Youth Tour Writing Contest. Ashley, a rising senior at Sequatchie County High School is pictured here being congratulated by SVEC president/CEO, Bob Matheny**

“Well, that was good back in that day, but surely by the 1970’s the majority of people had the electricity and appliance issue under control.”

Exasperated, Mom said, “Well, there were different problems then, In the 1970’s there was an energy crunch, so articles on conservation started to get printed. The cooperative knew that there would be no quick fix for the energy crunch, so they began educating the children. For example, Louie the Lightning Bug was the cooperative cartoon that taught children to flip the light switch off when they left the room.

“So, Mom, are you saying that the cooperative assesses the need of the community in practically any way possible? What about things like jobs, medical help, and education?”

“Yes, Julie, the Electric Cooperative and the Tennessee Magazine changes with the needs of the com-

munity. Do you remember last year when you broke your arm and we had to take you to the emergency room down at North Valley? Well, this magazine tells about the Rural Utilities Service loan that made that emergency room possible. The local cooperative saw the need and worked to reach the goals that wanted to be reached by many people.

“Well, this is interesting, here’s an example of how the cooperative helped in another state,” said Julie who was still staring at the magazines and probably not listening to her mother. “This one says that in October of 1969 when Hurricane Camille hit in Mississippi, crews from Tennessee went down there for days and weeks at a time until the co-ops in Mississippi were back in service.”

“See, that’s just another example of cooperatives serving the needs of others. Your grandmother valued that. That’s probably why she kept these magazines. Maybe she hoped you’d look at some of these one day and find the value of the past. Your grandma grew up with the cooperative, I grew up with them, and now you are growing up with them also. And they have changed in many ways to better meet the needs of their community.

After Julie and her mom finished that conversation Julie added, “You know, you’re right, you really can see how the cooperatives have changed to meet the needs of many of its members. However, the co-op has really let me down tonight.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I wish that the Tennessee Cooperative Magazine would have supplied me with the answers for my test tomorrow rather than recipes.”

“Well, I guess the cooperative knew that sometimes you can’t be told answers. You have to discover the value of growing up with history yourself.”