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| Childhood

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|   | Children on a seesaw, 1902 |
|   | Children play on a seesaw in 1902Photo: Library of Congress |
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Effie Hobby was born in Wurtsboro, New York on February 19, 1897. She was born Effie Louisa Hitt and had three younger sisters: Ida, Vera, and Florence. Her father, a blacksmith, moved the family when Effie was 8 to Nichols Village in Trumbull, Connecticut. One of Effie's daily chores as a girl was cleaning the oil lamps in their house and trimming their wicks. She also remembers that grocery shopping was an all day chore. On grocery day, her father would hitch up the horse and wagon to drive Effie and her mother from Nichols to Bridgeport (about six and a half miles) where they could buy all their groceries and dry goods.The early years of the 20th century were a time of great change in the United States. More children were starting to go to school, including women, minorities, and immigrants. African Americans were legally segregated from whites with the Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. And the newest American fad — the bicycle — was on the streets and changing the way women dressed. In earlier days, women had to wear long dresses with tight corsets, which made something like riding a bicycle impossible. As the sport of riding bicycles became more popular, women started wearing more practical clothing like bloomers (baggy trousers), which gave them new freedom in dress and movement.Bicycles were not the only new freedoms women were experiencing. In 1890, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was founded. It was an organization created to gain rights for women. These rights ranged from having the right to control their own money to having the right to vote. It would take some time, but women won the right to vote, and Effie was there.Think About It:How was it harder in the 1890s to be a child? Are there some things that are harder about being a kid today? |

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| High School

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In 1911, Effie went to high school. If she had been born just a generation or two earlier, Effie probably would not have attended school beyond 6th grade. In 1870, only 72,000 children were going to high school, but forty years later, in 1910, that number jumped to over one million students!However, there was no high school in Nichols Village, where her family was living, so Effie had to move 60 miles to New York City. She lived with her aunt and uncle in the Bronx while she went to school. Living in New York could be exciting, and Effie remembers waving to Teddy Roosevelt, the former president of the United States, during a parade.During these years, Thomas Alva Edison's film company asked her if she would audition for a role in one of their silent movies. Edison was the famous inventor who created the phonograph, the first practical light bulb, and the Kinetoscope (a peep hole viewer that was an early form of a movie). Edison created the first motion picture studio in New York City, but Effie never auditioned. Her parents decided against it. "Who knows," Effie laughs. "I might have been another Mary Pickford." (Mary Pickford was the first movie star of the silent movies.)While she was in high school, she joined the newly created Girl Scouts, and she is still a member today. She was very active as a Brownie troop leader in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Spending many summers at Camp Trefoil, she was the oldest and longest serving member of the local organization. Being a girl scout was the beginning of Effie's commitment to being a good citizen.Being a member of the Girl Scouts, Effie, like many other girls, found herself helping homeland defense when World War I was declared in March 1917. During the war, Girl Scouts sold war bonds, collected peach pits for use in gas mask filters, and learned how to save food.During World War I, the women's rights movement was put on hold. Famous suffragettes like Carrie Chapman Catt formed the Women's Peace Party, which focused on peace instead of women's rights.However, women did not stand still during the war. Because men were fighting in Europe, there were many new job opportunities for women. Women went to work on farms, as telegraph messengers, and even office managers. By the end of the war, about 400,000 women had joined the work force for the first time.Think About It:Why did World War I change the kind of jobs and opportunities available to women? |
| Winning the Vote

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|   | Women voting in 1920 |
|   | Women vote around 1917 in New York. Some states had the right to vote before the 19th Amendment.Photo: Library of Congress |
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Carrie Chapman Catt and suffragettes had convinced President Woodrow Wilson and other political leaders that women had the right to vote. In 1918, Congress formally proposed the amendment. After passing Congress, it took two years for the required two thirds of the states to ratify the constitutional amendment. The Nineteenth Amendment was signed on August 26, 1920. When women got the right to vote, Effie was 23, and she made sure that she would vote. The presidential election was between Republican Warren G. Harding and Democrat James M. Cox. Effie voted for Harding, who won the election to become the twenty-ninth president of the United States. Some other women who voted in 1920 remembered casting their first vote. Catherine Lewis was 21 in 1920. She told the Houston Chronicle, "I remember my dad telling me, 'I can't believe the first time women vote is also the first time you will vote.' He was so excited, and so was I. He took me to the polls and told everyone about it." Ila Black Cuthbertson was also excited to vote. She was 27 in 1920, and she told the Charlotte Observer about that day, saying, "I voted the first time we got the vote. It just felt like I was getting a little more privilege. It was something new for us." However, voting was not easy for all women. Blanche Benton remembers "many of the men said if their wives voted, they would leave them. Even my mother didn't want to vote the first time." She told the Charlotte Observer that the men did not need to worry because many women voted like their husbands or fathers in the beginning, but Blanche voted her conscience. "My husband, he said to vote the way I wanted, and he would vote the way he wanted." Think About It:What do you think it would feel like to vote for the first time?  |

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| A Lifetime of Voting

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|   | Effie Hobby in 2002 |
|   | Effie Hobby in 2002Photo: © Bob Child/AP Wide World |
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Effie married Milton W. Hobby Sr. in 1923 and moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut. She had a son in 1928, and today, Effie has three grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.During World War II, she volunteered as a member of the Civil Defense and worked for years volunteering with the Red Cross Blood Bank and at the Bridgeport Hospital.Effie has voted in every election since 1920. "I was always taught that [voting] was one of those things we should do. It's a privilege to vote," Effie told the Associated Press.Today, Effie lives in Wesley Village, an assisted living residence in Connecticut.On February 19, 2004, she turned 107 years old.Think About It:Why do you think Effie feels so strongly about voting? |