My Hometown

A small town revisited, if only in memory.

By Anna Barker Loudermilk

It has been said that you can't go home again. How true! The years slip away, and it's impossible to hold them back. We can no longer chase butterflies, get in one more game before dark, swing in the old porch swing, and listen to grown-ups talk at night.

Favorite places are gone now. Callie's hole-in-the-wall café and the shoe shop have been torn down. The depot has been hauled away to another spot. The Troutman post office, with its dark oily floor, is no longer there. In the name of progress, it was moved down the street.

Many of our friends are gone too: Daisy, Bruce, Fan, Jessie, Edrie, Lucy, and others. Yet there is one place where these things will remain unchanged forever —in my heart. Troutman, N.C., as it used to be, will always be my hometown.

It was a small town. Some people called it a wide place in the road. Others said, "If you blink when you go through town, you might miss it." However, most of the people knew each other, and it was a nice little town to grow up in. We moved there when I was 9 years old and my sister, Barbara, was 6. The year was 1934.

When we moved to Troutman, it didn't even have a stoplight. For transportation, a freight and passenger train ran twice a day. The old steam engine chugged in at 2 o'clock going to Statesville and on to Taylorsville in the afternoon and was back again at 6 o'clock in the evening on its way to Charlotte, N.C. A greyhound bus stopped in front of the drug store. Eventually, a city-type bus from Statesville made trips to Troutman and back.

This is the depot after it was moved from the original site. An individual bought it and then sold it to the Troutman Historical Society.

Barbara and I loved to ride the train. The depot was built along the side of the railroad tracks. We would go to the depot and buy our tickets from Mr. W.D. Troutman and wait in the cool waiting room. The straight, hard chairs weren't built for comfort—just durability. The train chugged in and the conductor called, "All aboard!" We rested on the train's red velvet seats and looked out the windows at the fields and houses as the train glided by.

We spent the afternoons going to Rose's 5-and-10-cent store or to Newberry dime store. Sometimes we would get a bag of popped corn and enjoy a movie at the Playhouse Theater. We were careful to be sure that we got back to the train depot in time to catch the evening train back home.

Back in 1934 a portion of the wooden sidewalk still remained. It lay in front of Callie's café and the shoe shop. As a child, I loved to hear the clonking sound it made as I strode across the wooden planks. It was removed during the late 1930s.

Just beyond the shoe shop

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was a sheltered spot called Loafer's Glory. It was just a bench leaning against a brick wall, but it was a place for the older men to gather. They would gossip, enjoy the sunshine, chew tobacco, trade jokes, and watch the people go by.

One afternoon, Uncle Edd was passing the time of day with the men gathered at Loafer's Glory. He told this story:

"I was standing near the sidewalk, when this lady came by wearing a fur coat. She was leading a mangy dog on a leash. After she passed by, I remarked to the others, 'Now if that ain't society gone to seed.'"

The Neil brothers ran a false-fronted grocery store where George Young had once operated a drugstore. Bread was 10 cents a loaf. It was wrapped in cellophane and sealed at one end with a colorful sticker. Kids loved these. Cokes were 5 cents.

The awning in front of Neil's Grocery Store covered the sidewalk and was held up by two metal posts. We would put our hands on the post and swing around. It was fun, and we did it often. We also played "don't step on the cracks in the sidewalk" as we went merrily on our way. We had to be creative in our fun and games. Since there wasn't much money, we had to use our imaginations.

There was also Vance Wagner's hardware store, Bud Brown's grocery, Troutman Drug, two barbershops, and Haze Neil's filling station. The Ostwalt Flour Mill stood at the edge of town on U.S. 21, and there were a couple of chair factories and a cotton gin. Later, a bank, a shirt mill, and two furniture stores came into town.

Sunday afternoon found Troutman a lazy, sleepy little town. All of the stores were closed except the drugstore. If someone was sick and needed medicine, the drugstore would be open for them to come to. The drugstore was a nice place to be. There were small tables and chairs for people to sit at and have ice cream or a soda. The fans overhead would turn lazily around, stirring the air. You could pay your telephone bill there, if you had one. My family didn't have that luxury until after the war.

Sunday morning found people making their ways to the church of their choice. There were four: the A.R.P. Church, Troutman Methodist Church, Troutman Baptist Church and the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. Barbara and I attended the Lutheran church for a while, then the Methodist church for some time, and finally the Baptist church. We even went to the A.R.P. Church a few times. The Baptist church was a mile away, so until we had a car we went to churches within walking distance.

In the evening, troop trains carrying our boys off to war traveled through our small town. The memory of seeing two soldiers standing in an open boxcar silhouetted against the evening sky still brings sadness. Even today, scenes from my hometown are etched in my memories, lying there in the corner of my mind, just waiting for me to reminisce about the good times in the Good Old Days. ❖

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