

10-cent squirt gun then would run all over town having squirt gun battles. These were not super soakers. The tiny orange-plastic pistol shaped squirt guns were plugged with a little white, rubber stopper on the back. It seemed like the rubber stopper was always loose and leaked water. If you were lucky, you might find a green rocket ship squirt gun with the number 908 on it. This squirt gun resembled a rocket ship and the rounded design held slightly more water than a regular squirt gun, but the rubber stopper was just as bad.

"Birdy" Russell operated a gas station that had an old Coke machine with a glass door on the front that let you see the bottles sitting in round slots. Insert your coins and you could pull the bottle out of the slot to be replaced by a new one that fell into place by gravity. I remember opening the glass door to feel the cold air that chilled the sodas. The hot Missouri summers made me always appreciate such a refreshing smell.

Duncan's Five and Dime was Dixon's toy store. The first Matchbox and Hot Wheels cars showed up for sale there. Matchbox cars originally came in a package that looked like a Matchbox. I had the Coca-Cola delivery truck that had tiny little green Coke bottles stored on the racks of the tiny truck. I had the entire collection of Marx plastic Universal Monsters figure toys. Duncan's sold them for 10 cent each, but they are now worth from \$10 to \$70 each depending on which monster. I have lost count of the plastic model kits bought and assembled from Duncan's. My favorites were the monster kits such as Frankenstein, Godzilla, Dracula, The Phantom, The Creature and the Hunchback, but there were plenty of funny cars, planes, ships, and racecars put together and painted using Testor's glue and paints.

On Halloween a downtown fall festival featured cakewalks, BBQ pulled pork sandwiches and hot chocolate. I never knew who the person was who dressed as the mummy but they always were scary. Duncan's Dime Store sold Halloween masks. There was one mask that was semi-transparent and had big, red lips. You could not tell who was wearing the mask because it blurred their features. Someone told me later that it might have been Mary Jones. Several high school boys terrorized younger kids by filling their mouths with shaving cream or throwing vinegar eggs that smelled like sulfur. Some kids would Trick-or-Treat for Unicef, using orange boxes to collect coins instead of candy to help children in other countries.

There were many thriving businesses in town. The MFA located next to the railroad tracks sold groceries and dry goods. I remember trying on Levi's jeans in the dry goods section. Their meat section had a few white refrigeration units with the meat displayed behind glass to keep it cold. Their wooden candy shelf included all the favorites including bubble gum trading cards ranging from baseball stars to The Monkees.

Another wooden candy shelf in town was inside the Sinclair station. Sinclair sat along Highway 28. The building smelled of gasoline, oil and old wooden floors. I'm certain the petroleum smells emanated from the old gasoline pumps and from the repair garage attached to the building. I remember getting wax-wrapped salt-water taffy strips, bubblegum cigars, and monster-sized jawbreakers from the Sinclair candy shelf.

Sometimes, just dad and I went to dinner at Dambach's Restaurant. They served plate lunch meals and your normal assortment of sandwiches and sides including fresh hand-cut French Fries. The restaurant sat across the road from Clark's Jewelry and Drug Sundries store in downtown Dixon. I was sitting in the restaurant with dad when the movie Psycho was re-released in theatres. On the side of Clark's store was a wire frame displaying the Psycho movie poster. I was so scared of what I had heard about that movie that I was afraid to even look at the poster, especially sitting in a darkly lit diner. I remember having hot cocoa with tiny marshmallows at the restaurant after going around town singing Christmas carols with a group

from our church.

For a while, we had a green Ford Mustang. Imagine mom and dad with five kids crammed in a Mustang driving from Dixon to Rolla. In those days, there were no children's car seats. Sam, who was the littlest, would sit on mom's lap in the front seat. In the back seat were me, Hylan, Billy Dean and Scott. Sometimes, one of us would lie on the rear shelf under the back window watching the stars while we headed home.

Dad and mom would take us for a ride in the family station wagon. During fall, we would drive on country back roads looking at the scenery and enjoying the sunshine. There were times when we would visit homes of my parent's friends. The fields held thousands of lightning bugs, which us kids would catch and keep in an empty Miracle Whip or Mason jar.

I remember where I was when I heard that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. It was my sixth birthday on Nov. 22, 1963 and I was sitting in Mrs. Hester's afternoon Kindergarten class. Mrs. Hester came in and frantically said, "The president has been shot!" Even though the tragedy had taken place earlier, we shared cupcakes and Tootsie Rolls with the class that my mom had brought for my school birthday party. A few days later, I was at grandma's house watching live TV and saw accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald get shot by Jack Ruby. Being only 6 years old, I wondered why there was all this news coverage on TV and no cartoons.

Dixon celebrated it's centennial in 1969. In May, centennial chairman Harland Ellis dug the hole for the razor's "grave" witnessed by Judge "Roy Bean" Alexander. Handbills posted around town proclaimed rules that every man in town should wear a beard during the celebration. Those without beards would face the judge's wrath and be temporarily locked up in an outdoor wooden jail that had been constructed next to the Dixon Railroad Depot by the Brothers of the Bush. Nearly everyone in town took part by dressing up in old time clothing on weekends. Two books were published, one about the 100-year history of Dixon and the other a photo book showing towns people in their centennial finery. Other souvenirs produced were a shaving permit pinback button, Brother of the Brush pinback button, centennial pinback button, key fob, a wooden nickel, a souvenir ash tray with art of the old downtown pagoda and a souvenir plate featuring prominent town landmarks including the city pagoda, train depot, opera house, round house, Roose-Murphy mill and a train engine. Delores Miller did the artwork for the centennial plate and ash tray.

The Dixon Theatre showed the movie Nashville Rebel starring Waylon Jennings prior to the week-long August celebration. Waylon performed live at the centennial at the Dixon Saddle Club arena on Friday, Aug. 22. Admission was \$1 for adults and 50 cents for children. I remember sitting next to the stage while Waylon sang. I took one of the cardboard handbills with Waylon's picture on it that had been hanging at my dad's grocery store to the show. After the show ended a crowd assembled by his bus hoping to meet him and get an autograph. When Waylon came out he greeted the fans and the first thing he did was reach out over everyone else to take the poster I was holding out of my hands. He signed it and handed it back to me. My sister Hylan had her centennial wooden nickel signed by Waylon. She still has it to this day.

1969 was also the year Dixon took the state championship in basketball. John Brown played on that team and eventually went on to play for the Atlanta Hawks professional basketball team. John was a hero to the kids in school as well as the entire town. Being a star-struck kid, I asked John for his autograph while he was sitting with his friends inside Andy's Family Room. I still have his signature on that little piece of cardboard from the back of a menu receipt book.

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