

GROWING UP IN DIXON 50 YEARS AGO

by Van Beydler



Beydler Family

In the 1960s, Dixon held lots of adventure for me. There were five of us kids with me being the oldest of the bunch. My sister Hylan was the nearest to my age followed by my brothers Billy, Scott and Sam. If we didn't have our bikes, we walked everywhere. We would play baseball in the backyard with each other and the neighbor kids, ride our bikes or climb to the top of an ancient pear tree behind our house to pluck the fresh, sweet fruit that would ripen over the summer. It was easy to get a bellyache by eating pears right off the tree.

To earn allowance, I helped my father at his grocery store. Bill Beydler operated Beydler's IGA, which sat on the corner of the downtown square. The old brick building had slick red panel siding to modernize its look. A wooden frame with chicken wire attached to the wall held a movie poster advertising the latest feature showing at the Dixon Theatre located down the street.

Dad's office was built behind the wall of the bread aisle. It was elevated about eight feet off the ground so you could look over the top of the wall and see the entire store. You had to climb a wooden ladder attached to the wall to get to the office, which held a desk and filing cabinets. Boxes of products waiting to be stocked were stored underneath the elevated wooden floor.

I helped as a carryout boy. When I was on a break, I would read comic books while sitting on the boxes stored under the office. Sometimes you could actually lay down on the big packages of flour that were stacked nearly six feet high. When a carryout was needed, one of the cashiers, Blanche Evans or Jewel Sooter, would holler "Carryout!" I would run to the cash register and start bagging. I always hated to bag frozen orange juice. The cans were

always so cold it would hurt your hands to pick them up. There is a technique for properly bagging groceries. You never put eggs or bread on the bottom of the bag.

We stocked the old wooden shelves with everything from Heinz 57 Varieties Pickles and a new product named Gatorade to Quaker Oats and Aunt Jemima Pancake Mixes. Dixon's Pancake Queen competition originally started as a supermarket promotion. Years before, the grocery store sponsored the event in which Aunt Jemima would come to town. She, with a group of townsfolk, would judge the winner of the Pancake Queen contest on the back of a trailer parked in front of the store. Many people in town would attend the event and get a special price on Aunt Jemima products, too.

I have always loved collecting advertising items. Mountain Dew soda had pictures of hillbillies on the bottles with the slogan, "It'll tickle yore innards!" Mountain Dew bottles each had the 'signature' of its maker printed on the bottle, such as "Bottled by Tom and Jerry."

An old 7UP soda machine sat inside to the left of the front door. I would get a six-pack of Grapette, Orange Crush, YooHoo, Mountain Dew, Fresca, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, 7UP or Dr. Pepper from the shelves to reload flavors that were low.

I had to move the empty and return bottles from the front of the store to a shed out back. In those days, bottles had a deposit fee. If you returned your bottles you didn't have to pay another deposit. Some of the bottles would be absolutely nasty. People would return them with cigarette butts inside, spit from chew, or just covered in mud or dirt. It was a dirty job to haul them to the shed and arrange them by distributor. The soda delivery trucks would pick up the empty bottles to rinse and reuse them at the plant. Sometimes I wondered just how clean they got those bottles knowing how nasty they were when they were returned.

Buster Barnett drove the Foremost Dairy truck that brought fresh milk to the store. I loved to help Buster bring the milk inside the store because his truck was refrigerated. He would also give me a little carton of white or chocolate milk as a treat. Dad had a huge safe to store the money from the cash registers. One night, burglars broke into the store and tried to take the money from the safe. Dad sometimes worked late at night balancing the store's books. Luckily, he wasn't at the store the night the burglars broke in. He found their tools and the damaged safe the next morning but the burglars had not made it through to the money. Bill Perry repaired the damaged safe by using the combination dial from the vault in the basement. A photo and story about the vandalized safe was printed in the town newspaper. We never found out who tried to break into the safe.

Dad treated me to special items that came into the grocery store. He and I shared the first ever can of Pringle's Potato Chips to be eaten in Dixon, Missouri. A salesman stopped by to introduce