

GROWING UP in DIXON

by Van Beydler

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 carry-out 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.

The delivery truck brought new inventory to the store once a week. Using a long aluminum gravity skateway with roller wheels, we unloaded boxes from the truck onto the sidewalk outside the store. One of the first things I did to help at the store was to stamp prices on cans and boxes. There were no bar codes in those days. Dad would use a large ink marker to write down the price on the side of the box. I would use rubber stamps with prices ranging from .01 and up to mark the cans, boxes and bottles according to the prices written on the box. It was easy to confuse the .01 stamp with the 10 cent stamp if you didn't pay attention, especially if someone else had put the stamp in the wrong inkwell. Pressing the stamp back onto the inkwell pad would refresh the ink when it went dry, which happened quite often.

After being priced, we would move the boxes inside for shelf stocking



Beydler's IGA in downtown Dixon used the basement under this building next to the grocery store to store inventory. An old bank vault was located there, too. All photographs courtesy of Van Beydler.

or put them in a storage area underneath the old building next door, which had once been a bank. Boxes were put on wooden pallets that sat on the concrete and dirt floor. A large vault, installed when the bank was built, was located in the storage area. I remember finding silver dimes that had fallen into the dirt over the years. I assume the coins fell out of the cloth drawstring bank bags that were stored in the building when the bank was in operation. When the building was torn down in the 1980s, the old safe was covered up and is still sitting there, buried under tons of earth.

The store's ice machine sat outside on the sidewalk. On a hot summer day, I would stick my head inside the metal door and breathe in the cool, icy, fresh air. One time I had my head inside the ice machine and I heard someone yelling at me across the

street saying, "You need to get your head out of there!" I don't remember being a very sassy kid but this time I blurted out, "My dad owns this store!" The man who had yelled at me turned out to be the town marshal. He just chomped on his cigar and continued walking down the street.

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



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event and get a special price on Aunt Jemima products, too.

One time I opened a case of Gatorade to stock on the shelves. Inside one of the brand new bottles delivered to the store was a partially eaten fried chicken leg. Instead of stocking it on the shelf, I immediately pointed it out to dad. We figured someone at the plant must have been eating lunch and tossed the fried chicken leg in the vat. Needless to say, we didn't stock that case on the shelf.

Stocking the breakfast cereals was fun, probably because I could see what new prizes were offered on the colorful boxes of Frosted Flakes, Rice Krispies or Cocoa Puffs. We could hardly wait to find out which plastic toy was hidden at the bottom of the box, and it was always on the bottom. Many a kid would impatiently cut out a ragged-edge 45-rpm cardboard cereal-box record featuring a song by The Archies or The Monkees. Who would have believed then that cereal boxes from the 1960s would become collector's items. Nabisco Rice Honey's and Nabisco Wheat Honey's boxes featuring an offer for the Beatles' Yellow Submarine rub-ons are among the more valuable 1960s cereal boxes. The Beatles tie-in makes the boxes extremely desirable and worth about \$700.

The Beatles were featured on a particularly large cardboard display that dad set up across the aisle from the meat coolers. To a kid, the display seemed to be 10-feet tall but it was probably really only six-feet tall. The



This photo shows my youngest brother Sam Beydler inside Beydler's IGA. He had stocked the bananas and dad rewarded him with a soda.

standee had huge black-and-white images of John, Paul, George and Ringo but I don't remember what the display promoted.

The produce bins sat across from the soda shelves. Dad would keep whole watermelons underneath the cooler so people could buy one that was cold. I enjoyed the smell of fresh dill, which people used for making homemade pickles. Cantaloupes sold at 5 for \$1.

I have always loved collecting advertising items. It must have come from seeing the posters used to promote sales at the grocery store. I remember hanging produce posters cut

in the shape of apples, oranges and bananas. The store had those fold-out honeycomb paper hanging displays in fruit shapes. The honeycomb paper is thick so they fold up and come back out with nice edges time after time. A metal clip holds the fold-out in place.

Products featured great packaging, too. 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. Lifting the aluminum lid to make a selection, you would slide a bottle through metal slots into the dispenser, which was locked until the proper coins were deposited. It was fun to stock the soda machine. There was a special large hex key used to open the back door to load the bottles. I would get a six-pack of Grapette, Orange Crush, Yoo Hoo, Mountain Dew, Fresca, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, 7UP or Dr. Pepper from the shelves to reload flavors that were low. A bottle opener was attached to the side of the machine. The bottle caps would fall into a receptacle, which we would empty when it got full.

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.

At one time, I had a collection of soda bottle caps. The soda companies would print photos of baseball players or have bottle cap promotions underneath the cap. You had to

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scrape off cork glued to the inside of the cap to find out which player you had collected. About the same time, some companies started using plastic inner liners instead of cork. Sometimes they would peel the ink image right off the bottle cap. Using tape or glue, you could attach the liners to a specially printed game card to see if you collected a winner.

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.

In those days, grocery stores would deliver to people's homes. Dad would take an order over the phone and we would bag the items and put them in the back of an El Camino to make the deliveries. I would help take the bags inside the house when we arrived at the delivery destination. Sometimes it was necessary to put the groceries in the pantry or refrigerator

when we delivered items to someone in a wheelchair. I was surprised the first time I ever got a tip for delivering groceries. After walking up a steep flight of stairs and putting the groceries in the proper shelves, I was given a quarter. This was big money for a kid back in those days.

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.

As I mentioned, Dad would work

late at night on paperwork, adding up receipts and sorting the coupons turned in by shoppers. Many times my brothers and sister and I would play in the store at night. We would have shopping cart races. We laid face down on the lower flat metal part of the cart under the big basket. Using our hands to move the cart, we would race up and down the aisles or have cart wars and crash them into each other like they were bumper cars. Our hands would be extremely dirty after that game. Another fun thing to do was to climb the support poles in the center of the store. The poles were about 14 inches in diameter and stood a good 20 feet in the air. We would grab around the poles, much like a Hawaiian climbing a palm tree, and shimmy up above the shelves. I don't think any of us ever made it all the way to the top of the very high ceiling.

I thought I was being a big help for when I decided to pick up the flyswatter and get rid of some of the

flies that were in the store. Back in those days, most stores did not have air conditioning and there were a lot of flies buzzing around the produce aisle. I climbed up on the refrigerated racks and started swatting and keeping count. I excitedly ran up to dad and told him I had killed 100 flies! Dad took me aside and told me he was very proud of me but I should tell him that information a little quieter next time.

Dad brought home some promotional items that he shared with us. There was a Heinz 57 button in the shape of a pickle. He gave me a pencil sharpener with the IGA logo on it. I used it to sharpen the pencils I used at school. Dad also 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 the product and encourage dad to place orders for stocking it on the shelves. We thought they would be a big hit.

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Dad would make trips to St. Louis to pick up items to sell at the store. I got to go with him on a trip to St. Louis to pick up boxes of frozen chicken. We were driving in St. Louis and I yelled out, "The Arches!" and pointed to it in the distance. Dad kindly corrected me saying it was "the Arch, not the arches." At the chicken distribution center, we walked a long way into what was likely a butcher house, but I only remember being in the front offices. On the way home, dad took me to an A&W Restaurant, where we had their famous root beer in a frosty mug.

At home, dad would draw up the weekly grocery advertisement for the newspaper. I remember helping him pick several items to include in the sale ad. I believe my artistic creativity was fostered by encouragement from dad and mom.

My granddad, Dorsie Sooter, owned and operated the OK Barber Shop, which was located next door to Sease

and Veasman's Drug Store and across the street from Blanche Barnett's store. Dorsie's shop had an old furniture sized vacuum-tube radio. The huge round dial on the front had the names of distant countries on it.

When waiting to get my haircut at the barbershop I always liked reading Grit, especially the cartoons. In the 1960s, Grit was published as a tabloid newspaper. Advertisements in comic books encouraging young boys make "big cash and prizes" to sign up to deliver Grit to subscribers. I dreamed of winning the brand new bicycle printed on the page as one of the prizes. Additional reading material included Life, Look, and other magazines and newspapers.

Dorsie would have musical jam sessions in the back room of the barbershop. He played guitar and sang. Many years later, when I worked at KJPW Radio, granddad brought a couple of reel-to-reel audio tapes he had recorded to the studio while I

was broadcasting. I aired one of the songs he wrote about his mother and I still have those tapes today.

Barnett's Store sold clothing, shoes and other dry goods. On the counter was a cardboard display featuring a photo of actor Jerry Lewis with slots to donate coins to Muscular Dystrophy. A gumball machine and toy capsule machine sat next to the cash register. I still have a little Wheaties plastic charm that came in a capsule from that toy machine for the cost of a penny.

During summer, the school sponsored Saturday morning ping-pong games inside the junior high gymnasium. At one time it had been the old high school gym. The sandstone rock and concrete building didn't have any air conditioning. The doors were left open to allow for a small breeze to run through the building. A dozen or so ping-pong tables were set up inside the gym. Big Train Jackson and others helped instruct us on the rules

of the game.

Organized basketball games took place every Saturday morning in the elementary school cafeteria. A photo timer with a loud buzzer kept track of the time for each quarter. We played on teams along with dozens of other boys from town. Sometimes we had to play shirts vs. skins.

We never went to school until after Labor Day. Fourth grade was the last class of the elementary school. That year our teacher read Old Yeller and Charlotte's Web to us. Chuck Baker and I would trade baseball cards. Of course, we bought baseball cards for the gum. No telling how many Nolan Ryan cards were used during the next year because pitchers always went on the bike spokes first.

As I approached my house after school, I could smell the aroma of dinner from the kitchen of my mom, Georgia Beydler. You could smell mom's homemade spaghetti sauce from a block away. Mom would

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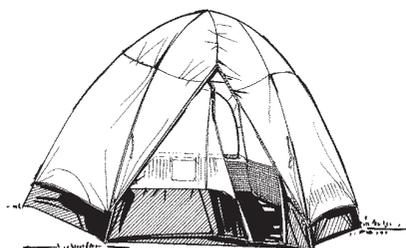


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sautee the garlic, onions and grated carrots in olive oil before adding it to tomato puree and tomato sauce. Bay leaves, sugar, oregano, salt, pepper and some water rounded out the recipe that simmered for hours before being put on the table. Mom's enchiladas and "Bugs Bunny Stew" were also family favorites. Bugs Bunny Stew was actually homemade vegetable soup with cabbage, carrots, celery, potatoes, yellow onion, tomato juice and loose-meat hamburger. When my brothers and sister and I were little we wouldn't eat it. Mom told us the stew had carrots in it and Bugs Bunny ate carrots. This was our incentive to eat it because we all watched Bugs on Saturday morning TV. If it was good enough for the "wabbit" it was good enough for us, too.

Art and Mary Jo Clark ran Clark's Drug Store, one of the gathering places on the downtown square. A Rexall Drug Store sign hung from the corner of the building. An old metal sign on the side the building advertised Dr. Pepper. As you walked in the front door there was an old dial payphone on the left. Glass cases with jewelry sat in front of a greeting card rack. Over the counter medications lined the shelves leading further into the store. You could drop off film for processing at the front counter. Processing took only a week or two. Behind the counter were new Kodak camera kits and accessories including flash bulbs, film and lens attachments. A candy rack full of sugary treats sat between the front counter and the soda fountain. A Coca-Cola calendar hung on the wall above the cash register at the soda fountain. You could sit in the orange vinyl booths or on a stool at the counter to get a nickel Coke from the soda fountain, a pizzaburger and French Fries or a Treat. A treat was an ice cream concoction that had marshmallow cream on the bottom, a layer of chocolate syrup, hand-dipped ice cream, another layer of marshmallow and chocolate topped off with ground peanuts, walnuts or pecans. This was in the early days of soft-serve ice

cream and most places still dipped their ice cream for cones, milk shakes or malts. We liked to dip our French Fries in ice cream. Lots of people put peanuts in their Coca-Cola.

Sid and Faye Snider had all the first run films from Hollywood at the Dixon Theatre. Admission to the Saturday afternoon movies, which were always a double feature, was 25 or 35 cents. With a dollar, you could buy a soda, buttered popcorn and several kinds of candy and still have money left over. Theatre candy came in huge portions, too. You could choose from Necco wafers, Sugar Daddys and Sugar Babies, Chuckles, Butterfinger, Baby Ruth, Snickers, Chick-O-Sticks, Dots, Mike and Ike, 100 Grand Bar, Chiclets, Zagnut and jawbreakers, just to name a few. If you were first in line you could get in the movie free by being the kid to put theatre show bills under the window wipers of cars parked downtown.

The Western Auto store was located next to my dad's grocery store. They carried bicycles and bike parts. I remember buying a bell and streamers for my bike. The streamers were attached to the back of your bike seat. The streamers were made of plastic strips with big pieces of glitter embedded in them to catch the sun. My sister had a wide tire girl's bike and one of us had

a bike with raised handle bars and a banana seat. I remember they carried Captain Action figures and accessories. Captain Action had a variety costumes allowing him to become Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Flash Gordon and a host of other characters. Western Auto also sold the James Bond and Oddjob action figures from the movie Goldfinger. Oddjob came with an accessory lethal flying hat called a deadly derby. Most of us boys in town had G.I. Joe action figures including the storage case that looked like a military locker.

Many a kid would roam around town picking up empty soda bottles because they had a deposit fee. You could get 2.5 cents by turning in empty bottles at the grocery store. At 2.5 cents, you had to turn in two bottles to make it an even nickel, otherwise you only got 2 cents for a single empty bottle. I remember picking up soda bottles around town with my friends Herb Colley, Randal Hayes and Jesse Vance. We would get enough cash to go to Duncan's Dime Store to buy a 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 are 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.

Every spring, I would go to Duncan's to search through their selection of kites. I always wanted the one that had the skull and crossbones printed on it. It was a challenge for the neighborhood kids to see who could get their kite to fly the highest. The more string you let out the higher the kites would fly. Sometimes we would tie double rolls of string together to get more altitude. One time, my kite was so far up in the sky I could barely make it out. Staring at the blue sky,



Clark's Jewelry and Duncan's Five and Dime in downtown Dixon, circa 1980.

trying to find that kite, I would see “floaters” and black shadows as my eyes tried to focus.

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 business-

es 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 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.

Colley’s Snackette was located south of Dixon at the Highway 28 and “O” Highway junction. The snackette served hamburgers, French Fries, and other fast food. They had a pair

of Seeburg 100 Wall-O-Matic jukeboxes mounted on the east and west outside walls. People waiting to be served could choose one of the hits of the day to play over the speaker system strung in the gravel parking lot. Speakers were also mounted in the playground area behind the snackette. I remember playing on the swings and hearing Roger Miller sing Chug-A-Lug and Do-Wacka-Doo over those speakers. Colley’s served a 64 oz. “Monster Shake” that was a sure brain-freeze waiting to happen. I only ordered it one time at the hefty price of \$1. Every 4th of July, a fireworks stand would be set up in the parking lot selling Black Cat fireworks.

Dad bowled in league at the Colonial Lanes bowling alley in Rolla. He was on the team with my granddad Dorsie Sooter. Over the years, other bowling team members included Wes Filley, Don Ramey, and Clifford



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White. Dad would take me along and I would either watch him bowl or I would play the pinball machines. The first time I remember having a toasted ham and swiss cheese on rye sandwich was at Colonial Lanes. I thought they had invented a brand new sandwich no one else had ever heard of and that it was the only place to get one. My culinary horizons would be expanded more in the coming years.

Sometimes we would stop on the way home and eat at T & T Restaurant, which was an old Route 66 truck stop and diner near Newburg. I always wanted us to stop there so I could eat breakfast with dad and the bowling team. Even though I was a kid tagging along I felt like I was part of the group. I would have hot chocolate served in their big, heavy coffee mugs. There were menu signs on the wall with fluorescent lettering on a black field highlighting the special of the day. For some reason, I wanted to own a set of those plastic ketchup and mustard dispensers with a waitress holding a serving tray printed on them like the ones in the diner. The strange things kids think they need.

In the early 1960s, we made several trips across the United States. During one of these road trips on old Route 66 I remember seeing the sun come up over the horizon as we drove up to a rest stop. It was one of the first times I remember using an outhouse. I thought I would fall in.

We stopped at a grimy old Route 66 gas station with a gift shop. I remember the front door was painted green and was heavy to open. The windows were covered with dust kicked up by automobiles passing by on their way to their destinations. To keep us occupied during the trip, my parents let us choose a toy for the road. I remember having trouble trying to decide whether to get a View-Master viewer with reels featuring 3-D images of The Flintstones, Quick Draw McGraw and Huckleberry Hound or another toy, like a gyroscope. Thinking there was no easy way to play with a gyroscope in a car I ended up choosing the View-Master. I tried to show the images to my two-year old little sister Hylan, who was sitting in the backseat with our younger brother Billy Dean. I was frustrated that Hylan would only open one eye to look through the viewer. I kept trying to get her to open both eyes to no avail, but she still seemed to enjoy it.

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 loved going to visit Grandma and Granddad Sooter's house. A large chest deep freezer sat in the entryway of the back door. Eunice Sooter, my Grandma, would serve us ice cream in one of her Fire King Peach Lustre chili bowls. I remember her cooking scrambled eggs and brains for breakfast in a hot iron skillet on the top of a white range. I don't ever remember eating them, though.

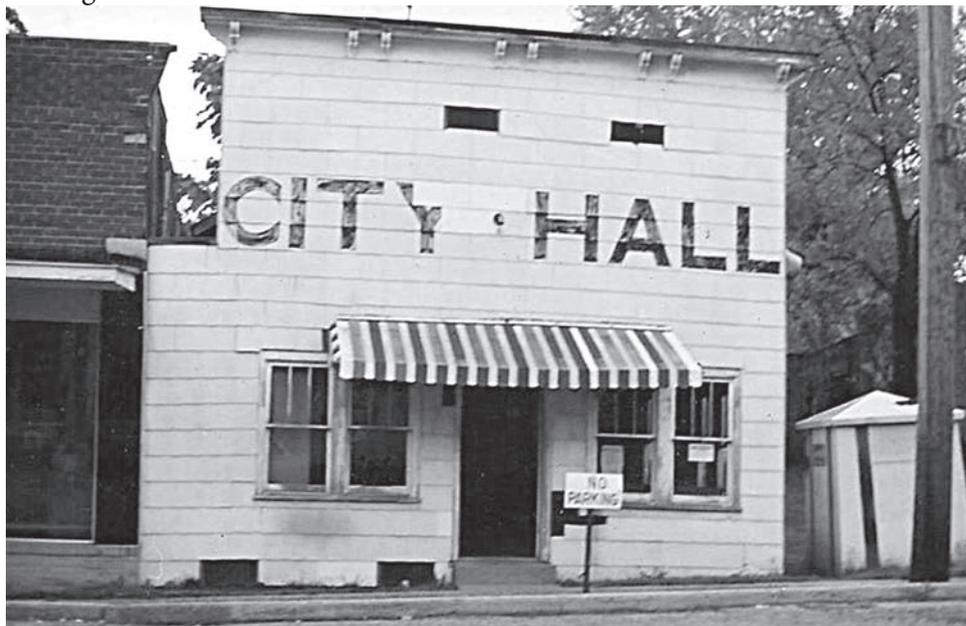
We had many wonderful Christmas dinners at their house. Grandma's turkey dressing was my favorite thing to eat with the turkey and trimmings. She would combine turkey broth with two whisked eggs, crumbled, dried sage, dried dinner rolls, and salt and bake it in a pan at 400° until it was bubbling and golden brown. If there wasn't enough turkey broth, canned chicken broth would be added to make the dried rolls moist. Adding salt was optional because she rubbed salt inside and outside the turkey so the broth could be salty enough.

Grandma's house had a water-cooled air conditioner in the front room windowsill. It cooled using

dripping water. You could stand in front of it inside the house and look through the front grill to see the water dripping onto a metal plate. I could stand there for the longest time breathing in the cool, fresh water smell that came out of that air conditioner. It was like the fresh smell of rain on the wind before a storm.

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 still 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.

The Beatles invaded the U.S.A. the next year and I remember getting a Beatles coloring book from Duncan's Five and Dime and coloring it at grandma's house. Grandma had several kid's books and toys we would play with including Disney Golden Books and a jigsaw puzzle of the United States. All of us loved to play with the Kittie in the Kegs toy. It consisted of several nested barrels



Dixon City Hall in the 1970s.



The Beydler family. Front l-r: Bill Beydler, Scott Beydler, Sam Beydler, Georgia Beydler; rear, l-r: Billy Dean Beydler, Hylan Beydler, Van Beydler.

with each smaller barrel fitting in the next largest size barrel. The last and smallest barrel contained a plastic kitty cat. The toy dates back to 1953 and is a child guidance toy.

We would also play hide and seek in grandma's back yard. They also had several huge wooden cable spools in the yard that were used as tables. My siblings and I would turn the spools on their sides so they would be able to roll. We would stand on top of them and start to walk and try not to fall off as they picked up speed. We could never stay on them very long because they started to roll to fast. Sometimes we would hold onto the round middle portion and have brothers, sisters or cousins push the spool to see if we could hang on.

We played a neighborhood version of hide and seek called Dirty Pig. Larry Prater, Carol Clark, other kids and my brothers and sister would play Dirty Pig after it got dark. Playing Dirty Pig was similar to hide-and-seek except the person who was "it" was the dirty pig. To start the game, the dirty pig would hide their eyes. One of the other kids would use their finger to "draw" on the back of the dirty pig and talk out loud while they were drawing the image. They would say, "Draw a circle," while drawing a circle on the dirty pig's back. Then they would say, "Two eyes..." at which point the person would tap two eyes inside the imaginary circle. You would continue to draw facial features and say "Eyebrows, a nose, a mouth, freckles and a biiiiiig cigar!" Whenever you got to the cigar, you would light it by tapping on the dirty pig's back. When the cigar was lit the dirty pig would start counting to 100 and all the kids would run and hide. After counting to 100, the dirty pig would start to find you. The last person to be found became the dirty pig and the game started again. We also played a version of freeze tag where you were frozen by the dirty pig and could be freed by being tagged by another player.

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 townspeople in their centennial finery. Other souvenirs produced were a shaving permit pinback button, Brother of the Bush pinback button, centennial pinback button, key fob and a souvenir plate featuring prominent town landmarks.

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.

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 for 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 menu receipt book.

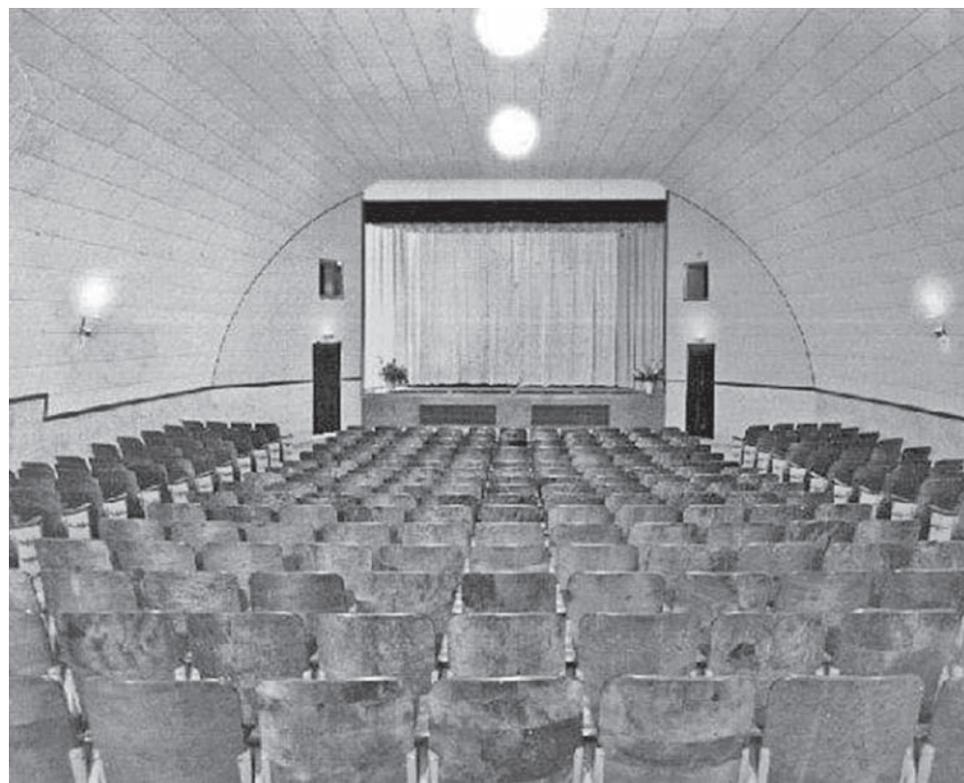
Don and Mary Anderson operated a restaurant named Andy's Family Room. During the season, they hung several poster boards with booster messages on the walls of the diner so people could sign their name. Andy's also had pool tables, pinball machines, arcade games and a jukebox. Every week, they gave a free meal to the person who had the high score on the pinball machines. I won several times and always ordered Mary's delicious chicken and dumplings.

Dad renovated several buildings in Dixon. I was never good at the

hammer and nail thing and I think dad probably knew it. I probably would have mashed my fingers flat or sawed off an arm. However, I did help to move something, hold up a board, or deliver a tool he needed. Dad renovated the old theatre building in Dixon. Dad and mom operated a live country music show in the building during the 1970s. Harland Ellis and others performed shows on weekends while mom and dad took admissions and operated the concessions. Later, dad removed the theatre seats and renovated the upstairs into a living space for the family. Downstairs, mom sold clothing at a store named Beydler's Econo-Mart. That building later became Brandt's and is now home of the Dixon Weather Service.

These are just a few of my memories of growing up in Dixon but there are many more...from playing basketball at Hauck's Court to baseball games at the Khoury League Park. Family reunions at the city park and watching the Ozark Opry perform live under the park pavilion. Running home from school in time to watch Dark Shadows on a snowy, TV signal. Sledding in the snow with my brothers and sister. Skipping rocks across the Davis' pond behind our house. Heading down to Jones Creek to swim while avoiding the water moccasins with their heads darting out of snake holes along the rocks and mud banks. Picking wild blackberries and watching mom cook them into jam. I can only hope that you have as many fond memories of growing up in your hometown as I do.

Van Beydler was editor of the *Old Settlers Gazette* from 1984 until 1995. Van served as public information coordinator for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Division of Environmental Quality from 1997 to 2014. He is now the Division Information Officer for the department's Soil and Water Conservation Program and also does work for the department director's office. For 17 years, Van has been the coordinator of the department's activities at the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia.



The Dixon Theatre auditorium.