

Growing Up In Miami

By Barbara Switzer Holman



In the northeast corner of Oklahoma, there is a town named for one of the many Indian tribes that settled there. It is called Miami. The Indians came to this area to hunt the abundant game and fish the many waterways, the biggest of which was the Neosho. The Neosho River sometimes races and other times meanders down from Kansas, depositing rich soil as it skirts the land south and west of the city. This alluvion makes the land a prime location for farms and ranches.

But north of Miami, the landscape changes. When I was young girl, I thought the land which stretched from Miami north to Pitcher had dropped down from the moon. Here mounds of gravel, called "chat piles," formed a bleak landscape that was colorless and forbidding. The lead and zinc mines, which were at the zenith of their activity when I was growing up, threw out tons of waste from their diggings where miners labored in the cool dark tunnels as they dug and blasted the solid rock walls looking for the valuable minerals that had been discovered during the great scramble to explore Oklahoma in the late nineteenth century. As the gravel was spit out by the ore crushers above the ground, gray dust was misted over homes, businesses, and the little bit of greenery that had been spared from the mines and their tunnels which stretched for miles underground.

This diversity of landscape and its uses gave the eight thousand inhabitants of Miami a broad spectrum for income. They could be farmers, ranchers, miners, busi-

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ness men, or land speculators. This challenging arena also gave the city the distinction of having more millionaires per capita than any other town for its size in the United States, or so it was rumored. This fact figured into my family's life in that the presence of wealth brought development and work to my father. My dad was one of the fortunate men who had a pay check coming in each week during the Great Depression while many others around the United States were struggling to feed their families. His security and his sense of humor in dealing with his family made my days in Miami some of the happiest I would ever have. But I didn't know, then, that I would see it that way. I was just too busy living the good "small town" life to be very reflective. Now that I look back on it, the picture is very clear.

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My brother, Bill, and I grew up living so close to downtown that we could smell the bread being baked at the Marvel Bakery on North Main. The air would be filled with the seductive aroma. On many a Sunday night, my dad would succumb to its powerful scent to rush over to buy hot loaves straight out of the ovens. Within just a few minutes, he would be back. My mother would have the bread knife ready and the butter on the table. She would slice thick pieces of the steaming bread on which we would slather hunks of freshly churned butter. We would watch the butter melt onto the slices before we brought it dripping to our mouths for the first bite. Sharing this culinary treat just added to our happiness in our cozy little house.

This home was one block from all three schools that constituted the first through the twelfth grades. We attended the Pershing Grade School using its play ground as our second home. We would wander all around playing cops and robbers in the shrubbery or flying on the swings. But our tops in fun was the old fire escape, a heavy metal funnel about four feet in diameter, that was attached to the junior high school. We would gather up waxed bread wrappers, butcher paper, and, if our mother could afford to part with it, some sheets of waxed paper that she used to line her baking pans. We planned our foray, with great precision, on the tube-like slide that protruded out of the third story study hall. When school was not in session, we would scramble up to the top through the dark, shiny interior that smelled of spit and sweat. Then we spread whatever slick paper we had managed to appropriate on the floor at the top of the shoot, making sure the paper was wide enough to cover our bottoms. This arranging was done with great care for the space at the top was narrow, not deep-set, and highly polished so that one false move could send you on your journey down the shoot before you were ready. So it was that we prepared ourselves, each time with a fresh piece of paper as the attrition of each slide rent the paper to shreds. Once comfortably ensconced, we would give a push off the side of the ribbed metal tunnel. Down we would go. As we gained speed near the bottom our screams grew louder and louder. Then we shot out like human cannon balls to the delight of any

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friends that were joining in the fun. The distance one covered in the blast out of the steel funnel was reason for celebrations and measurements. Sometimes we would measure a ten to twenty foot exit. Of course, the subsequent landing out on the hard ground, which was peppered with points of gravel, left our bodies scratched and bruised, but we would bravely arise to the cheers of our compatriots awaiting their turn at the "tunnel of doom." Among those friends joining in the storming of the fire escape were Joan Barnes, Sonny and Max Peacock, Herb Sherard, Colleen Johnson, all the Pryor boys, Richard Dobbins, and the Buttrey children.

All of these people lived around us on Third and A Street Northeast. Joan was three houses north of us; Herb lived next door; the Peacocks and the Pryors lived facing Third Avenue; the Buttreys lived about one-half block south of the school; Richard Dobbins lived across the street to the west; and Colleen's house was back of us on B Street. And I expect we all rushed out onto the street one morning (I think it was July 4th, 1937), when the firecracker stand, located at the intersection of North Main and the railroad tracks, blew up. I'm sure they were all as startled as we were when the first blast reached our ears. On glancing out the window, one could see the beginnings of the brightly colored blaze casting an ominous glow across the western sky. We ran out onto the sidewalk, dressed in our bedclothes, as the noise was just coming to its highest pitch. The rockets spewed and skittered with great flashes of sparkling colored lights. Kaboom! Crash! Zowie! Since we were only about one-half block from the fire, our nostrils were filling with the acrid smell of gun powder. Finally we could hear the fire truck careening down Main heading toward the explosion. It hit the railroad tracks and spun itself to a halt just on the edge of the track incline. We pleaded with our folks to let us go over closer to the "fun." No such luck. The closest we came to the fire was in the swing on the front porch as the flames started sissing and spitting when the jets of water hit them full force. Bill and I lamented the ruin of all our fun for we hadn't purchased our stash from the stand as yet and now it was up in smoke. The end had come to our plans for the 4th of July mayhem.

My brother and I were witness to many more calamities that happened on our street. These memorable events were brought about mainly because A Street was not a continuous one but dead ended quite abruptly. Many a quiet Saturday night was rent with the sudden splattering of a car loaded with late night party-goers smacking into the giant culvert that completed the end of the street. Sometimes these obviously inebriated people would manage to back up their battered car and worm their way around the flour mill that was opposite our house. This circuitous route took them directly into the path of the busy switch engines that operated day and night on the Northeastern Oklahoma Railroad tracks. The engineers, in their frustration with the

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inconvenience of having to deal with this intruder, would blast their horns angrily in successively louder bursts. But this was ineffective in moving the totally confused driver. Finally, the railyard came to a halt while the police were called to make arrests and bring peace back to our street.

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One really horrendous event that occurred in about the same location as the fireworks melee was the assassination of Miami's night watchman. It seems that he saw four men in a car with out-of-state license plates cruising slowly up and down Main Street as if they were casing one of the businesses. When they were heading north again and reached the lumberyard just at the edge of the NEO Railroad tracks, he pulled them over and told them to get out. When they began climbing out of the car, one of the men started shooting. The guard was able to kill three of them before he was fatally wounded. The fourth man ran off and hid. Our next door neighbors, Otis and Mazie Barker, heard all the gun fire so they called the police before heading over toward the shooting. Other people began arriving, too, until there was quite a crowd when the police drove up. The guard lived long enough to tell the police there had been four men in the car. So when the police started questioning the bystanders, they said, "Here are three of them—dead—where is the fourth man?" The man that was standing next to Mazie said, "Here I am." Mazie nearly collapsed from fright at the sound of these words.

The next day the three dead men were embalmed and then placed in open caskets which were leaned upright on the outside wall of Cooper's Funeral Home for all the town to see. My brother said he remembered our father driving us by in the car so we would have a first hand look at what happens to those who break the law. I was totally traumatized by the sight and had nightmares for weeks afterward.

Of course, Mazie, recovered from her fright, added this story to the many that she spun as our neighborhood story-teller. She gleaned many a tale to tell from having worked downtown since she was a young girl. She and her sister, Marple Roberts, worked in various retail stores. The one I remember them both working in at the same time was J. C. Penny. I remember seeing them being gay and talkative as they waited on customers, wrapping their packages, writing out their sales slips, and then putting their money and the bill in the small metal container that ran on taut metal lines that were placed strategically throughout the store. Mazie would pull down on the rope to which a wooden handle was attached. This shot the canister up to the cashier upstairs. There the change was made and a paid receipt filled out before this unique bit of cashiering sent the completed transaction back down to the salesperson. I longed to pull the wooden handle that sent the money rocketing up into the balcony. I thought that Mazie and Marple were the luckiest women I knew. I longed to work out, see people satisfied with my work, and bring home a paycheck. Besides

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those benefits, I wanted to hear all the stories that seemed to be one of the best perks to working out in public.

My mother loved to get the call from Mazie to come over to her house next door for the latest gossip. My little extra special friend, Joan Barnes, was usually at our house when this call would come. So she and I would tag along with my mother over to the Barker house. Joan was two years younger than I was, but had always been treated as an adult. She probably understood the gossip better than I did as I was quite naive. Even though I listened carefully to what was being said, I hardly knew what they were talking about. But usually at some juncture in the tale, she and I were sent back home or outside "to play" so that the more salacious details could be told. Joan and I would always speculate on just what we must be missing, but we seemed to understand that we were too young to hear everything. My mother would come home totally satisfied that she knew just how to tell the story to the rest of the neighbors who would start wandering over to our house. Since I had remembered it well, too, I felt I was ready to drag Joan over to other friends' houses to spread the news. She and I would always make our first stop at Colleen Johnson's house.

We were all becoming fast friends sharing all the sordid details of accidents, deaths, births, and misadventures that befell the hapless people that wandered into our little world. Yet, we had some generous streaks in our mischievous natures, too. One of the sweet things we did had to do with celebrating spring and the end of cold weather. This was the event called "May Day."

The three of us would enlist my brother's help in our preparation for the celebration starting with the accumulating of all sorts of odds and ends of construction paper or wallpaper books. We would role up the paper to make cones or we would use scissors, and paste—made with flour—to make little baskets. Our next move, I realize now, was horrendous. We raided people's gardens indiscriminately snipping tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and irises with our busy little scissors. (We sometimes added to the bouquets with bridle wreath that we had purloined from the school grounds.) Then we would make beautiful flower arrangements in our home-made baskets. These we assigned to our friends all over town. We would load them into our wagon and go house to house ringing doorbells or knocking with a bright yell of "May Basket" and then run and hide. We would peek out to watch the basket being retrieved then continue on to the next delivery. I have never heard anyone speak of doing this in our present day and age. I guess the horror of stealing flowers, which we did in all innocence, would bring a lawsuit today.

I remember walking from my house over to Main to grocery shop for my mother at Farrier's Market. I would walk right through the Botts family's yard on the path I had carved there when the house belonged to my grandfather, Dan Switzer. We had

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a charge account at Farrier's which my father paid each Friday evening. After the debt was satisfied, Mutt Farrier would always fix up a bag of candy which was the usual way to encourage people to be prompt in their payments. My dad would bring home the gratuity—which he called in his Arkansas colloquialism as getting a “poke” of candy—with a swagger of pride at having been accepted as a man who paid his bills on time.

Walking through the Botts' yard took us over to another favorite haunt. We called it “The Greek's Place.” It was a small restaurant across from Farrier's that had the greasiest hamburgers in town. We couldn't get enough of the fried onions, steamed buns, and succulent dill pickle slices that accompanied the juicy burgers. It only took one little quarter to get a bag of six. But one day after a repast from there, my mother became deathly ill with ptomaine poisoning. Of course, she attributed it to the hamburgers. From that point on we were not allowed to go near the place. We tried to warn Colleen and her family off of it, too, but they were just as we were before we saw how sick they made my mother. They just had to have those greasy treats.

Speaking of food, did you ever drive over to Baxter Springs to have hot dogs, curly fries, and pineapple milk shakes at Byrds Drive In? This was another of my mother's favorite places. Friday night was pay night. Friday night meant eating out to my mother. My dad was an awful tease who took great delight in telling my mother first thing as he walked in the door with his check in his hand, “Where's supper? You surely don't think—just because its Friday—we are going to eat out again tonight.” I can't imagine what fun it was for him to throw a wrench into our plans, but he tried it quite often and my mother succumbed to his practical jokes every time. Her face would fall along with her upbeat spirits. I felt awful when I saw how disappointed she looked. But, of course, my dad would finally make a great show of relenting with my mother beaming with relief. She knew that trouble could really ensue if my dad insisted on staying home as she never cooked on Friday evening. She spent most of the day seeing to our comforts and fun. We knew we could always count on my mother to pitch a baseball, swing a hockey stick, or sit down on the sidewalk for a quick game of “jacks.” So when would she have time to cook? Family harmony would be restored when my dad's silly joke had played itself out and we could all climb into the car for a trip to Baxter Springs or all the way to Joplin and Reds.

Now “Red's Place” was my favorite place for hamburgers. Here one found burgers about the size of a large biscuit. The meat would be topped with a dollop of delicious slaw containing a hint of red pepper. To me this was the way to make a burger. Besides you could get twelve of them for only one dollar. I remember one time my brother, Bill, who had apparently made a habit of getting his fingers stuck in

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"pop" bottles was warned: don't go fishing for your straw down in the bottle. Of course, he did it again. This brought the whole operation to a halt while my mother and the owner, Red, worked on getting Bill's finger loose. They did and we left in red-faced haste. My mother was totally humiliated. She was easily crushed by what others thought and all her actions and, she hoped, ours were premised on: "What will the neighbors think?" Of course, this is a small town's conscience. Probably the best stimulus to keep youngsters and, especially, teenagers from completely ruining their lives and their parents' peace of mind.

As for peace of mind, do you remember when your father would get none at all unless he relented on a Saturday night about driving the family car downtown to park it prominently in front of one of the stores such as Woolworth's or Penny's or Kemp's? My mother put the pressure on my dad many a Saturday night before he would reluctantly abide by her wishes. Then we all would scramble into the car clutching our allowance monies for we knew that along with the visiting we would have the opportunity to wander the isles of Woolworth's to shop for candy and games. But mainly, we went down town to join all the other happy Miamians spending a fun evening among friends and relatives. I remember the summer I was in town to attend my brother's wedding. I was strolling along with my first child in hand and quite pregnant with by second. Coming toward me mirroring my condition was gorgeous Katherine Wright. We both were exuberant in our greetings with plenty of references to creating large families. She expressed her happiness in being a mother and what a lovely life she was having. Also, she said the Saturday gatherings on Main Street had made it possible to see many friends that she could never had contacted on a one to one basis. She joined me in my enthusiasm for this small town tradition.

Another tradition I embraced on a Saturday night was Amateur Nights at the Coleman Theatre. This brought out many people who had hidden talents that we knew nothing about. Do you remember hearing eight-year old Mary Chandler singing, "My Buddy," which had everyone teary-eyed? (When she was a teenager she performed with Earleen Coffman and Joan Barnes. I remember hearing them sing, "Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me.") I was greatly impressed on the evenings when I would see Colleen joining with Louis Solomon strutting their stuff in a revue from the Virginia Lee Patrick School of Dance. I saw performers reciting poetry, playing the piano, strumming guitars, and heaving accordions. To top the evening off, tickets were drawn for free bags of groceries. I never won. But the evening's entertainment made up for that. It was true Americana in action.

Also, at the Coleman Theatre one could sometimes attend a Saturday morning cooking show. Then, as you were leaving, Marvel Bakery would hand out miniature loaves of bread while the gas company gave you recipes such as creamed chicken on

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toast points, or some other practical recipe such as Fresh Salmon Teriyaki. Did you ever see any fresh salmon in Miami, Oklahoma?

No. No fresh salmon. But we did have fun. How about our Halloween Parades? These usually were made up of students from every school in town dressing in some theme that the principal had designated as proper. One year I remember being at the head of the parade from Pershing Grade School. I was the Statue of Liberty and marching beside me was Tom Curtis as Uncle Sam. But my pride in my beautiful costume had me with my nose way too high in the air to see the street sign embedded in the middle of the street in front of The Coleman Theatre. Over I went on my face with my costume ending up around my shoulders. There for all the world to see were my old long johns that my mother had made me wear on that cold, dark night.

Do you remember those stop signs? They were about four inches high with the word "stop" painted in red. That was all there was at all the major intersections to direct traffic. And, remember, Main Street was Highway 66 with all the trucks and cars flowing right through the heart of the city. No wonder Miami went with the new electric signals. We were becoming a grand metropolis.

This growing city had three theatres at one time. They were The Ottawa, The Glory B, and The Coleman Theatre. But only two of them was I allowed to attend. The smelly one and the grand one. Which ones were they? Why The Glory B and The Coleman Theatre.

I cannot forget how The Glory B smelled. As you entered the lobby to buy your nickel treat the scent of popcorn and chocolate assailed your senses. I breathed deeply knowing that was the best smell in the place. Picking up my choice of an "All Day Sucker," which, by the way never lasted as long as promised, I'd try for a seat at least half way down the aisle. This position had been drilled into me by my mother's fear of my ruining my eyesight if I sat any closer. Thus, I would contentedly gnaw on this sweet caramel treat as the latest cliff hanger serial played itself out to a new "Continued Next Week" finale. Then on came the main feature of some good old cowboy, such as, Buck Jones, Bob Steel, Tim McCoy, Johnnie Mac Brown, or Gene Autry. In between the serial and the feature, you tried to make your run for the rest room. Not too successfully, I'm afraid, as everyone had the same plan. So you scooted away from the rest room door to be able to see the screen and get your nostrils loaded once more with the great aroma wafting from the lobby. Then it was back to the "Ladies" where you were overcome with the stink of human excrement and grape-scented room deodorants. I don't know if they ever actually cleaned the rest rooms. I think instead of detergents and a brush, they just kept putting stronger crystals into their over-the-door scent dispensers. By the time you groped your way back to your seat, your head was filled with all the obnoxious odors. It took awhile for it

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to flush, so to speak, from your nostrils so that you could then get the other smells that emanated from under every seat in the place. This was the sweet, sickly scent of gum freshly chewed and then deposited on the bottom of the chair by some grubby fingered little movie-goer. The flavor of choice was usually double-bubble strawberry or juicy fruit.

Now the Coleman Theatre Beautiful was another experience all together. It's Moorish design inspired lavish displays of sculpture, expensive fabrics, and brilliant lighting effects throughout the building. It was all done in exquisite taste reflecting pomp and circumstance. It actually had a royal quality about it. One of the queens of that theatre was Mrs. Giffin who played the organ solos at the intermissions. Am I wrong or did a ticket cost more there than at the other two theatres? All I remember is that I felt pampered and spoiled by all the plush surroundings and the higher tone of the movies. Besides, was there a better balcony than the Coleman Theatre's for necking? Most girls felt pretty romantic with their boyfriend's arm around them as they sunk down into the thick upholstered armchairs provided throughout the place. The best seats for private hugs and kisses were those up against the velvet curtain that separated the first and second balconies.

But those memories are of my later teen years. Growing up with good friends you had more fun going to birthday parties than anything else. To my mind some of the best party givers were Colleen Johnson, Ruth McDonald, Joy Sprague, and Laura Jenny Wilson. The ultimate in kiddie cuisine was served at Ruth's parties. She was fortunate in having a father that could put together a feast of all children's favorite foods. He really won us over when he told us we could have all of the food that we could eat. This was an invitation that none of us could refuse. This was a favorite dream come true: to eat all you want of french fries, macaroni and cheese, hotdogs, baked beans, plus big slices of chocolate cake topped with ice cream.

As for fabulous parties, I commend those given by the Wilsons for Laura. I'll never forget the one they gave right after her mother had had the house redecorated in the latest fashion. It was all done in white. The walls were white, the couches were white, the end tables, rugs, and even the baby grand piano were white. An aura of Hollywood was reflected in the huge mirrors that were placed strategically in all the rooms of the house. I look back now and realize how brave her mother was to invite thirty or forty pre-teens onto the dramatic white carpeting and expensive sofas.

The busiest party animal was Colleen Johnson. She and her mother had the market cornered on imagination. They threw parties for Halloween, Christmas, Easter, their birthdays, your birthday, and my birthday. Of course, the party that sticks in my memory was the surprise one that they threw for my sixteenth birthday. It was a Wednesday evening. Colleen and I made plans, ostensibly, to attend Bank Night at

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the Coleman Theatre. I was anxious to leave and Colleen hadn't come by so I told my folks that I was going to walk over to get her instead of waiting on her any longer. My dad seemed upset, which puzzled me. Never before had he ever seemed slightly aware of my comings and going from Colleen's house. Yet, I was completely oblivious to his importuning and never suspected a thing. I, blithely, started out for the Johnson house just as Colleen reached the alley that separated our houses. She said that she had forgotten the tickets and did I mind going back by her house just for a second? In I went to the kitchen which seemed awfully quiet. She made a pretense of looking around for the tickets. Then she said, "Gosh, Barb, I bet I left them on the dining room table." So out we go from the kitchen into the dining room and into a huge outcry of "Happy Birthday!" I was totally flabbergasted by the unexpectedness of seeing and hearing all those boys and girls shouting and giggling. But what a lovely surprise.

But Colleen didn't need birthdays alone to prompt her to organize fun time. Just give her a bright, sunny day in January. This time she called to say she had all the gang lined up to ride their bikes out to Spring River, have lunch, and ride back. Wouldn't that be the thing to do for fun on such a beautiful day? I readily agreed. I put on a light weight shirt and thin cotton slacks as it was an unusually warm day. Off the group started. We were boisterously happy as we rode our bikes along with gay abandonment. We had our lunch on the cliffs above Spring River; then we started back. About that time a "norther" blew in. The temperature dropped from the eighties into the thirties in just a short period of time. Our teeth were chattering and our hands were blue with cold. By the time I reached the city limits I knew I was chilled to the bone. I dropped out of the group at the corner of Elm and Third Avenue Southeast to knock on the door of my grandfather's house. He could tell by looking at me that I was sick. He had me crawl under the heavy comforter he had on his bed while he called my mother. When she arrived, she seemed shocked by my chattering teeth and blue-tinted skin. She promptly wrapped me in a heavy wool coat and stocking cap before rushing me to Doctor Wormington's house. He sent me home to stay in bed for a week. But wasn't that party a hit? Could Colleen put together a memorable day? You bet. She was inventive, inspired, and totally unflappable.

Our other party giver "deluxe" was our gentle friend, Joy Sprague. Her house always seemed to be filled with good food and warm family times. We girls were constantly hinting for her to invite us to stay for a meal as her mother was an extraordinary cook. The lasting memory for me of Joy and Mrs. Sprague was the patience they took in providing a week-long trip for us into the heart of the Ozark Foothills to spend lovely warm days on the banks of a private lake hidden away from civilization. Here we were allotted a guest house belonging to their family friends who had

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extended the invitation for them to bring us along. Each day, we would arise to the fragrance of bacon and eggs being cooked on an open hearth that was located out on the front patio. This alfresco repast gave us a great start to our busy day which included climbing mountains, swimming, and basking in the sun. As we explored our environs, we found that the owners had developed this Shangri-la with much hard work and imagination. There was a dam with locks; a diving board; canoes for exploring the immense lake; and paths to wander up and down the mountains that surrounded the whole compound. I was fascinated by two unusual features of the owner's home. They had a covered stone-paved porch extending out over a creek on which they had opened up a fishing hole. Anytime of the day you could drop a line in total comfort to fish for fresh mountain trout. Also, on this screened porch they had installed their bed. It was suspended by thick ropes which allowed it to sway with the gentle breezes that blew through the valley where the house was located. One could lie on the bed listening to the bubbling brook as it ran into the spring house where they kept their butter, milk, and fruit chilled.

One of the prime attractions of the acreage was a mysterious cave of gargantuan proportion that flanked the private lake on one side. We would paddle canoes up to the edge of the shore which was solid sand stone jutting out broadly from the cave. This slab of stone was big enough to hold a football field. There we would lie back in the boat gently bobbing on the water while we let our imaginations conjure up the images of long dead beasts and men that must have inhabited the cave in past millennia. But despite all the diversions of flora and fauna, our girlish delight of the week was the finding of us girls by the boys that lived back in those mountains. I remember, or at least, I seem to remember, that Betty Lamphear drew the most attention from the Ozark swains with her stunning figure. But we were all courted and teased as we swam, boated, and ate lovely food that Joy's mother provided. We came back from that Sprague outing sunburned, smiling, and satisfied.

But we didn't actually need all this organization to have fun. We innocent children of that period could just lie in the sweet smelling grass in our back yards and gaze wonderingly at the gorgeous black night sky. Do you remember how easily you could see all of the constellations? Finding the big dipper was a breeze. This was when Miami had very few street lights. We would never have gotten away with our Halloween madness if bright lights had been in place when we were children. Can't you just see us traipsing downtown with our noise makers, our horns, and our big bar of Ivory Soap? We blasted and smeared our way from the Ford dealership in the three hundred block of North Main all the way to the corner of second and South Main. We soaped the windows first on the east side of the street. This included Wilson's Paint Store, Dawson's Jewelry, Botts' Wholesale, Montgomery Ward,

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Kemp's, J. C. Penny, Woolworth's, Hub's Mens Clothing, Tucker's Lunch, The First National Bank, and The Security Bank. Then we would cross the street to take care of the west side of Main Street. We hit Saft's Furniture Store, Wiley's Drug Store, Crown Drug, Rosebud Ladies Wear, Dyer's Grocery, Miami Hotel, Coleman-Hutts Drug Store, Roy Green's Grocery, the bowling alley, and any car that we happened to find on either side of the street. Later all this soaping was thwarted by the applications of kerosene to the windows by the merchants. It blunted some of our fun, but we made up for that with other skullduggery.

One outlet that our parents provided was the uninhibited fun of scavenger hunts on Halloween night. How many families did we discombobulate with our pounding on their doors with screams of "Scavenger Hunt!" "Scavenger Hunt!" Then we would put them to the test with a search for such things as a peacock feather, or a cowboy hat, or a dog collar, and just to add to their fun, our begging for the biggest skillet they had. They knew all of us so we usually got what we went after. But what noisy monsters we all must have seemed.

After the period of family-arranged debauchery, we grew into our awkward teens. We didn't want to be total failures in society so we enrolled in Ballroom Dancing with Virginia Lee Patrick. She gave lessons at the Veterans of Foreign Wars building on South Main. We would climb the stairs to the second floor ballroom with our sweaty hands clutching the necessary fifty cents she required for each lesson. Often Colleen and I would run short of cash just before the time for the lessons would come around. This would send us off in a run with milk bottles we had hurriedly collected from around our houses. These we foisted off on Mutt Farrier for the refunds. These dance lessons were our life line right then and we knew no embarrassment nearly as great as being a wall flower. So hocking pop bottles or milk jugs for nickels was a small price to pay to be popular on the dance floor.

Now that we were "popular dancers" our next plan was to work out after school. I started at the Crown Drug Store as a fountain girl. Sad to say the hired help there didn't quite live up to my parents' idea of the kind of associates they wanted for me. So I had to quit and fall back on my friendship with Colleen to ask her to put in a good word for me at Rexall Drug where she was working. She did and I was hired to work as a fountain girl at John Wiley's Drug Store. Louis Solomon was one of our favorite side kicks as we jerked sodas. We three slaved after school and late into the night on Saturday. These nights were the most rigorous as the crowds for the movies rushed in before the show for a bite to eat and then swallowed up all the space in the store after the movie let out. We dug and dug into the cartons of ice cream practically going head first into the emptier ones. By the time Mr. Wiley locked the front door at ten o'clock we were saturated with nauseatingly sticky cream. To top it off

we had to clean the floor boards and booths of the spills and splattering that were brought on by our need to hurry our service. When we all parted for for the evening, we were totally exhausted and did we ever smell! Ugh! It took a long soaking bath to feel presentable for church the next day.

We were not the only teenagers working around Miami. My cousins—Joy and Buddy Kirk—worked for the Coleman-Hutts Drug Store. (This early introduction to pharmacy fired Buddy's interest in that field. He now owns drug stores in Muskogee.) Tommy Curtis worked at the Hub Clothing Store and gorgeous Pat Truman sold dresses in Kemp's Dress shop where I joined her after our high school graduation. Richard Wilson sold Sherwin Williams paint as he worked behind the counter with his father. I was always fascinated by the scene of a bucket of paint being poured over the world that adorned the side of Wilson's Paint Store. We kids were soda jerks, delivery boys, maids, salesladies, ticket sellers, and car hops. Frankly, it was fun to be a part of business. To really be needed and get paid for the work appealed to us all. Laura Wilson and Joy Sprague always lamented their inability to be allowed to work for they both lived too far out of town to make it convenient to get to work and then home. I felt really fortunate to live so close to everything in Miami.

This proximity was even more valuable during the years of 1941 to 1945 when we were experiencing rationing of gas and tires that put a crimp in our lifestyles. We made up for the lack of wheels with nice long walks to church, dances, movies, and "Teen Town."

Remember "Teen Town?" This was a place to go on a Friday night to dance, gossip, and see friends. Some lovely people had donated the use of the little house for our fun. We all pitched in with the decorating and organization. I remember painting with Shirley McCuskey on the cream colored walls. We ended up with more paint on us than where it was supposed to be, but we felt quite good about being treated as adults who could help in this way. Later, we had a board of trustees and a teen board to input ideas for parties. It was a glowing success.

The war years saw us getting used to phony cola syrup, fake cherry pies, sugarless cakes, and meatless meals. We learned to color plum pies with red food coloring to fool people into thinking they were eating cherry pies. We learned to like cakes made with honey and vinegar. We loved spaghetti topped with bread crumb "meat" balls. But we all hated the cola no matter how hard we tried to like it. I always felt sad to serve the stuff at the drug store, but that was all there was. I usually pushed the limeade topped with lime sherbet as a better substitute. I actually made a convert out of my mother. She would say, "Barbara, I'm making hamburgers tonight for supper. Why don't you bring home some of your good limeade to go with them?" This was a minor victory as my mother loved cokes.

But all was not lost as far as wheels were concerned during that period. There were still some very fortunate boys that owned cars. And then our generous parents sometimes gave us the family car for a Sunday afternoon drive or a trip to the latest movie. I remember one time Laura Wilson had been given the privilege of driving her family's black Mercury sedan. We parked outside the Coleman Theatre, saw the movie, and then climbed back into the car. Unbeknown to us, Joe Parrish had attached his car to the back of Laura's car with a thick rope. When she pulled out onto Main Street, there was a tug and a loud crash. Lying in the street was what remained of her car's rear bumper. We all reacted with shock and bewilderment, but Laura, when she saw the whole picture, went from shock to fury. Joe jumped out of his car practically crawling on his hands and knees begging for mercy. He said he would go with her to her family and explain what he had done. Which he did. This took courage as her father could look quite stern and humorless. Joe had the car repaired at his expense in no time flat. I'm sure Mr. Wilson's demeanor pushed him to a frenzy to put the car into pristine condition. I know his speed won Laura's friendship back.

So we made it to our graduation in the spring of 1945. We said goodbye to our friends as they paraded around in their mortar boards and flowing gowns. I can still see in my mind's eye pretty Mary Robinson with her cheery smile and lovely blond hair as she accepted her diploma. Following close behind her was limpidly beautiful Marion Stover. I cherish the image of all my friends eagerly seeking out their parents who filled the auditorium. My contingent consisted of my mother and father, my grandmother, my Aunt Betty, my Aunt Bernice, and Uncle Jim. The pride they expressed in their hugs and waves made the whole ceremony unforgettable.

Our next goodbyes were to our principal, Mr. Buchanan; our superintendent, Mr. Nickels; our favorite teachers, such as, Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. McCoy, Mr. Rainey, Miss Cameron, and Miss Galloway. Even though I admired and loved these educators, I had no idea how excellent they were. I found, when I was at the University of Oklahoma with my husband, William Holman, that I had a firm foundation in all the courses needed to graduate. These early teachers made our university years a breeze. Now I know that Miami had some of the best teachers in the state.

With Miami High School behind us, we took our last outing in the Silver Castle, Doc's Drive In, and all the ice cream parlors in town. We began to look seriously to our future. Some of us married soon after graduation. Others went off to the service or to the big cities for work. But all of us, no matter how far we wandered, looked back to Miami as "our town."