

The Old General Store

Anita Strahl

THOUGH I have not reached the age where reminiscence is a pastime, as I am only in my early twenties, I occasionally find my mind wandering back to my childhood. One of my most vivid recollections is the delight I experienced in visiting my uncle's old general store.

Once or twice a year, my family would take a trip to the southern part of Indiana to visit my relatives. Some people, without knowledge of it, might classify this area as the "sticks"; but the beautiful green hills, rolling sprouting fields, and bumpy dusty roads never failed to thrill me. After arriving at our destination and after participating in the customary salutations, I would immediately trudge to my uncle's store. The store was not like one that we would imagine today, as it was not squashed between two other buildings in a thriving metropolis, but was located all alone on a quiet, dusty road.

The store was always open, and a big friendly sign beckoned people welcome. The building was not large, and a chalky gray paint covered the loose boards. A large piece of wood adorned the front and towered above the rest of the tiny business place; I have since learned that such an illusion of height is termed a "false front." However I always had a firm belief that a strong wind could be the destruction of the building, with the help of the loose boards and the misleading front-piece. However, every year it remained standing, as if a million years had passed, forgetting to take their toll on the building; perhaps the paint would be a little more chalky, and the structure a little more stooped, but the store refused to change.

Upon entering the store, I found it necessary to mount large creaking wooden steps, obviously not intended for children's short legs. The door would squeak open, and I had to adjust my eyes to see the interior of the store.

At first glance a person might be depressed at the dark floors and walls and poor lighting, but the smell of recently polished leather mingled with a slight scent of sweets and drugs, enticed one to take another glance.

On one side of the room, rows of shining farm equipment, painted red and yellow, were placed carefully; and on the other side were racks of polished brown and black harnesses adorned with bright copper buttons. At the end of the room, rows of mysteriously shaped and colored bottles could be distinguished. Some of the bottles contained liquid, while others contained pills and capsules; the strange names, labeled in neat white stickers across the front of each bottle, were a cause for my childish wonderment.

An old glass case in front of the medicines gave forth a sweet yet spicy smell. This case contained almost all of the many assortments of candies, mints, and gums which my uncle sold. On top of the case stood a large jar, the largest I have ever seen, completely filled with long, black, twisted licorice.

A little old pot-bellied stove, with a crooked stove pipe, was placed at a most inconvenient angle; it was not at the end, or at the side, but rose out of the middle of the floor to dominate the store.

An old worn rocking chair, tilted at a dangerous angle near the stove, made one believe that the two had stood many long years together.

After I had examined each item in the store, my uncle would give me a brown bag, full of my favorite candy, to make the long trip home more pleasant for me.

It is hard to explain how an old country store can hold a child in fascination. Then, I believed that the gift of the candy was responsible for my feelings, but I have since realized that the old general store represented the quiet dignity, and mellowness of age, that I have seldom found in the world in which I have grown up.

Environment

Roland W. Becker

THERE is a room. The walls of this room are of varied shades of blue. Heavy red drapes hang over the windows as if to shut the brightness of day from its occupants for fear of disturbing their tranquillity. The contents of the room are numerous. Two desks, a tennis racket, a baker's dozen pairs of shoes, a double deck bed, two chests of drawers, a radio, an overfilled wastepaper basket, towels and facecloths on their rack, half-used packets of matches, piles of phonograph records, a stuffed loon, and a partially opened closet door are just a few of the items that give the room a well lived in look. The only noise that penetrates the room is the measured ticking of an alarm clock. The hands of the clock point to seven when the shrill ringing of the alarm breaks the spaced beat of its power system. It is a new day, and the two occupants of the room proceed to make ready for the various activities that are to come.

One might wonder how a person could possibly say that he was, is, or will be influenced by a room. Do not misunderstand. It is not the same room for everyone. A million dollar mansion, a "buddy" foxhole, a four room bungalow, or one room in a fraternity house—each is of important influence to someone. It is within one's dwelling place that dreams are born, decisions are made, and future plans are devised. One relaxes from the rapid pace of outside activity, and