



Beverly Vorpal, third row, second from left, is shown with her fourth-grade classmates at Grant School in May 1948.

Photo courtesy of Beverly Vorpal

Perry Street memories

By Beverly Vorpal, Correspondent

Beverly Vorpal takes us back to a time when the neighborhood was self-sufficient

The Perry Street neighborhood was the perfect place to grow up in the 1940s and '50s.

Solid, middle-class, Perry Street was the conduit to get to wherever you were going, said one friend. It was our path to school or church. It was the street to take us to Grant Park, across from the tall, imposing, three-story, red-brick elementary school where we went for nine years (including kindergarten, of course).

Now, more than a few decades later, city officials are struggling to help businesses reorganize and begin life anew. It "died" in the late '50s when many old-time merchants fell victim to competition that arrived in the form of a supermarket.

The only element that has been a constant in the life of Perry Street is the Liberty Park Florist. It opened its doors in 1928, and now, three generations later, the flower shop continues to flourish.

Perry Street was where our moms did their weekly shopping — and where I had to run to on my lunch break, to pick up something mom had forgotten. I think I ran to the store every blessed day of my life when I came home for lunch. Or so it seemed.

In those days, there were shops for nearly every need: three grocery stores, three meat markets, two gas stations, a hardware, drugstore, five-and-dime, a barber shop and beauty salon, a library and a really skinny store that housed a restaurant, with

seating only at the counter's soda fountain stools.

There was Mrs. Nehammer's small grocery shop — a 7-Eleven before its time — known for her outsized ice cream cones that sold for a nickel a scoop. (She also was known for her very handsome son, a grade or two ahead of me in school. Sadly, he never toppled to my fantasies.)

And most famously was The Windmill at 11th and Perry, which primarily sold cookies in those days, baked in a nearby rickety-looking building, emitting a wonderful aroma that let us know fresh cookies were available. There was a tiny, sweet woman whose white hair could barely be seen over the display counter.

There was Murphy's Service Station at Ninth and Perry, where Murphy would let us charge when our wallets were as empty as the gas tank.

Continued: Perry Street/5

Perry Street

Continued from 4

One day during World War II, when ration books were a way of life, a clerk at Burgan's Groceries at 10th and Perry, sidled up to Mom and whispered in her ear that he had bananas in the back and would she like some? He reserved them for his very best customers.

E.S. Burgan, a Spokane resident known as a grocery store magnate, owned some 35 grocery stores throughout the Inland Empire. E.S. Burgan and Son also owned a large department store occupying the block at Boone and Division, now known as Burgan's Furniture.

Erickson's Altamont Drug Store was at the southwest corner of 10th and Perry, across the street from its present location. As a kid, I had an allowance of 15 cents a week, and once that dime and nickel began to rub together in my pants pocket, I'd skip to the drug store and its ice cream counter.

First, though, I'd stand outside the large glass-paned window and watch a revolving tiered display showcasing ice cream items. I'd watch the mouth-watering treats go around and around. They called my name. With each revolution, I'd see what it was I came for: a chocolate ice cream soda with a scoop of ice cream peeking out beneath the fake fuzzy, bubbly stuff on top. Two straws finished the scene.

Also going around in its endless circle was a flat dish with three scoops of ice cream topped with chocolate, strawberry and yucky

pineapple. I'd stare at all the confections and repeat in my head, chocolate ice cream soda; chocolate ice cream soda; chocolate ice cream soda. Then I'd go inside, hop on a tall stool and state very assuredly that I'd like a chocolate ice cream sundae, please, and not know what I'd ordered until it was served. A sundae! I wanted a soda!

I'd push aside the terrible pineapple and choke my mistake down. I made that same mistake more than once. Slow learner, I guess.

On the northeast corner at Ninth and Perry was Liberty Park Baptist Church, where I went from the "Cradle Roll Call" as a baby, to when, in the '60s, the congregation decided to sell the church that was 50-plus years old and move south to 29th and Southeast Boulevard, where we thought we could build a bigger congregation.

Another religious organization bought the building and soon stood in the "skin" of the Baptist Church. I had a great time telling people I'd been baptized and married in the Buddhist Temple.

On the day I was married in the church, my dad and I met in the entrance hall listening to the organist and the vocalist before it was time to walk down the aisle. There was Daddy, as I'd never seen him, looking so handsome in his white tuxedo jacket, and I, in my bridal gown, beautiful even though it was bought on sale and didn't have a train. Beneath that creation of satin and tulle, was my merry widow, cinched so tight that I could barely breathe, but I looked ever so thin. Daddy and I stepped out onto the church porch

and looked at the black clouds gathering and wondered whether a bad storm was coming. That very brief memory is one of my favorites.

Customers and the merchants knew one another by name up and down Perry. When Mom bought meat from Howard, of Howard's Meat Market, he'd give me a wiener to eat while he wrapped up our order. It was mostly to Howard's that I'd go on those two-block, noon-hour store runs.

About the time I was a bride, doing my grocery shopping in the late 1950s, Rosauers opened a supermarket on Eighth and Perry. What an amazing new concept. We could buy everything under one roof. And I think prices were lower. This was modern and convenient — the future of grocery shopping. It was also the death knell for the Perry Street shop owners.

One day on my way home from work, I stopped to buy something for dinner at Howard's new shop — after Mrs. Nehammer and her cute son

called it quits and moved away. When he took my order that day he looked at me with such hurt (or anger). I was so ashamed. Why hadn't I supported him? I guess I didn't realize the consequence of shopping in the supermarket.

It still makes my heart hurt to realize I contributed to the downfall of Perry Street. It's so sad to see the blight it has become. It wasn't until it was gone that I realized what a unique place it was.

City and neighborhood officials are trying to bring it back by installing new sidewalks and old-fashioned street lights. Maybe it will at least resemble what it was.

It's a terrible irony that the revitalization of Perry Street, some say, is dependent upon a grocery store opening where Rosauers once stood. A few grocers attempted to survive in that building once Rosauers left, but none successfully.

Here's hoping Perry Street makes a resounding comeback so neighborhood kids can create positive memories.



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