

# Shake, Rattle 'n' Roll: Laurel in the 1950s

Visitor Response Form

## **We want to hear from YOU!**

*Tell us your story of living in the 1950s either in Laurel or somewhere else!*

*If you weren't alive in the 1950s, tell us your impressions from your parents, grandparents, television, movies, books, and other forms!*

Name: Edward (Ed) Dawson, LHS Class of 57

Date: 05/12/09

*Tell us your story...*

I grew up on a small farm just a couple of miles from the center of Laurel in the 1940s and 50s. The farm was on Rt. 197, the Laurel-Bowie Road. At that time there were many small farms in Maryland around Laurel and it was quite rural. My Dad worked for the Federal government as an animal geneticist at the "Government Farms" at Beltsville and ran the family farm as a second job. Although Dad and Mom did most of the farm work, my 3 brothers, 2 sisters and I were expected to help. For us farming was a family business and farm chores took priority over most other activities. When us kids would get home from school in the afternoon we would have to feed the chickens, gather the eggs, slop (feed) the hogs and get the cows up to the barn so Dad could feed and milk them when he got home from his job. That kept me out of some of the trouble I might have got in but with plenty of open space on the farm I was free to do many things like shooting a BB gun or a bow and arrow, digging holes and chopping down trees that might have got kids in town in trouble.

One side of our farm was bordered by the B & O Railroad and I remember looking at the big trains, wondering about the people inside, where they were going and what they thought when they saw us out working in the field making hay, picking corn or herding cattle. It was quite a pastoral scene I suppose but times were changing. I remember when the Laurel Shopping Center was built in the mid 1950s and we could look across those same railroad tracks and see the lights of the Shopping Center from our house. I was rather excited at that development; things were happening and soon we had somewhere else to shop besides downtown Laurel.

Before the Shopping Center was built we did most of our shopping in Laurel at the stores along or near Main Street. Dad and Mom would go shopping in town once a week, every Friday evening. Mom would do the grocery shopping, usually at Safeway, while Dad went the bank (Citizen's Bank), to the feed & hardware store (Ashby & Harrison's or Cook's), to the Pharmacy or took care of some other errand. Mom and Dad would always have to check to be sure he had enough cash to cover what they needed to buy because cash was the only way to pay for groceries and most things as I remember it.

Mom always had a shopping list and coupons carefully arranged so she could shop efficiently and get just what she needed. She planned out all the meals for the next week for our family of 7 (my oldest sister was away by then), checked her coupons, the ads in the newspaper and made up a shopping list of exactly what she needed, taking into account what we had in farm produce. That wasn't easy because we raised a lot of our own food. Dad raised most of the chicken, pork and beef (sometimes veal) that we ate. We killed, plucked and dressed the chickens ourselves but, the pigs and cattle Dad would have slaughtered, dressed and frozen at a slaughterhouse in Ellicott City as I remember it. Some years Mom and Dad rented a freezing locker in a building across the street from Laurel High School and kept part of the meat in there when there wasn't enough room in the freezer at home. During the summer Mom and Dad would freeze and can lots of the vegetables and some of the fruits that we ate. Mom would have to keep track of all that in planning her shopping. I still marvel at her planning, shopping and budgeting skills.

I liked to go to town with Mom and Dad on those shopping trips. It was interesting and fun to go to the stores including Polan's (5cents to a dollar store where I liked to get candy), High's (where we could occasionally get an ice cream cone made with that smooth, "store bought" ice cream as opposed to the ice cream Mom made at home using cream from our cows), Bealle's (an old fashioned clothing and shoe store with a pot bellied stove for heat and where Dad especially liked to shop for our farm clothes and shoes), Ashby and Harrison's (a hardware and feed store where Dad would get feed for the animals and I could buy BBs for my BB gun), Western Auto (where we could get parts for our bikes, the cars and tractor), Gavrilles' (where I bought model airplanes and the guy always seemed to be smoking a cigar) and Armstrong's (where we bought our first TV I think in about 1953). But times changed when the Laurel Shopping Center was built a mile or so down Route 1. To me those stores were big, bright, modern and full of stuff to buy. But, you know what? I can't remember the names of any of them.

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