

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: Date:

Tell us your story...

These memories were written for the Laurel Historical Society.

My parents were affected deeply by the depression. My father needed a job so they moved from the Eastern Shore of Maryland where most of their relatives had lived for generations. When they first married, they had to live apart, my mother working in Dover but when they found out about me, they rented a one room basement apartment (with a Murphy bed) at 815 Main St in Laurel. We moved to the third floor of that building when my sister came along and had two rooms for the four of us. My mother made all of our clothes including our underwear on her small portable Singer sewing machine. She did our diapers and other peoples laundry in our bathtub and carried them down two flights of stairs and a hill to dry them. She then ironed them all for extra income. From the time I was 5, my father worked in Washington DC starting off as a stock boy for a paint distributing company and ending up as manager of the Paint division. He traveled by train to DC daily for more than 20 years (a mile walk to the train station) and his boss kept his job for him when he was drafted. My father did not want a working wife but by 1951, Momma insisted that she be allowed to work and began to work full-time as an assignment clerk for the C and P Telephone company. She retired from there 25 years later.

We moved to 803 Main Street(a duplex) from when I was 8 years old and to Brooklyn Bridge Road after that.

My sister and I walked to our schools(elementary and junior-senior high) which were 2 and 4 blocks away. We played in a vacant lot where there was a depression and a tree growing among the weeds. We called it "the foundation" We also played in the field behind it.It was between the duplex next to 815 and 803. We played games of war and of horses and very imaginative story-ridden free range games making them up as we went along. Our neighbor's older son would tell us frightening stories about Bluebeard and his cutting off the heads of his wives. We were quite alarmed at his narrative. (Interestingly, the child closest in age to me, Patsy Jewett and I both became physicians).

Early on, the Menicons lived at 803, the Arnolds in the far duplex, the Hansons at the near duplex and I remember a girl named Julia who lived in the house where the museum is located. The Elliotts lived across from our 803 house.

After the Arnolds (Jimmy and Mary were closest to our age) left, the Fletchers and their three sons moved in. We played baseball in the yard next to 815 and whomever hit a ball over the fence was automatically "out". Mrs. Arnold would make us milk with vanilla, sugar and ice on hot summer days. She was generous with it.

One day, Mr. X came home to find his wife and Mr. Y in a compromising situation. I believe the police were called. It was not to clear to us children what had happened.

My childhood was pretty ordinary. We did not have air conditioning. We cooled ourselves by keeping the shades drawn on our house and by running water in the hose and wetting ourselves down in our bathing suits. When the Laurel Swimming Pool was built in 1953, it was both literally and figuratively a ray of sunshine and we lived in that pool in the summers after that.

My sister and I bought tennis rackets and played tennis on the new courts on Montgomery and 9ths streets built about 1954. We had just enough money for the rackets and balls and the sports store owner paid the tax on these items. We mostly directed the ball toward each other to keep from expending too much energy. Years later, I learned that my racket was too large for my grasp, and that using a smaller diameter handle made it easier to play but my knees were having trouble then and I did not play much longer.

I was sick for most of my early childhood and my mother kept taking me from one physician to another. I was hospitalized twice; at the little hospital that the Drs. Warren owned and then at the Fort Meade hospital when Daddy was in the Army. Both times, I received penicillin shots in my 5 year old rump. It was given in beeswax every 3 hours then and I could not sit down or lie on my back because the rear was so sore. I had started school at 5 and missed something like 53 days of school from illness that year. It is a wonder that I survived.

My ear problem was finally cured with surgery at the age of 8. That necessitated a walk for a mile fairly frequently to the bus station. My mother and her girls of 5-6 and 7-8 years of age would walk to Route 1 and usually stand for an hour and one half and then walk 5 blocks to the Dr's office. She must have made at least a dozen trips, reversing to go home.

Life in Laurel was that of a very typical small town. Even though my extended family was not from town, I knew many people that I met on the street just going to school or to the dentist or the movies. I believe now, that we (citizens of Laurel) were not quite ordinary. Proximity to Washington DC was associated with a brighter than "normal" population.

I entered junior high school at age 11 which was in the same building as the senior high and we were truly incorporated with the older students. Teachers were strict and went by the book. Our one standout teacher was about 23 years old and was beautiful and inventive. Mrs. Lillian Larrimore. She lasted one year but had the most profound affect on me. She appreciated originality. We wrote poetry and stories and solved logic problems presented in an imaginative way.

Standout features of those 6 years of secondary education were the "hops", our beloved football and basketball teams and rumors of sexual activities, We were all a bunch of "hormones" then. Attending school were the half of us who had started first grade together and were together for our entire public education. From time to time, off and on, came a few prodigies who stood out as "weird" (we did not use that expression, though), army brats because of our proximity to Fort Meade, some students from neighboring areas such as Bowie, a Korean War veteran and a dog

who had gone to school with his owner, who had graduated already. The dog was named Midnight and was written up in the Washington Post. There were a few town scandals regarding drugs but drug use was not common then. We had both one of the tallest and one of the shortest players on our football team in our senior year. I sold hot dogs at football games and tickets at basketball games.

For spending money (and for clothes money), I pushed a non-power mower to cut grass for my parents and their neighbors, then baby sat from age 14yrs. I worked at a drugstore as a clerk and soda jerk, cooking eggs, making sandwiches, ice cream and other treats selling other drug store items. From age 11 until age 17 when I went off to nursing school, I cooked all weekday family meals and also baked for my mother for bakesales. I took piano lessons (as did many other people my age) from Miss Ramey (who did not inspire a love for music) 8 .

Life in Laurel, for me, was largely centered about the movie theater (there was only one) where we saw many Westerns and an indiscriminate number of flicks all censored for our delicate constitutions by the Maryland Board of Censors and our attendance there was censored by Mr Weagly, our high school chemistry and physics teacher. He once had worked at the Calvert distillery, His wife was an elementary school teacher and they had two sons who went to our school. I attended movies all day Saturday, some Fridays and some Sundays. I used to get terrific headaches coming out to the bright out of doors after being used to the dark for hours at a time. Usually there were double features. One could stay over. Theaters were not cleared between films back then. All of my social life (that counted) took place in this building. I met my first love there. He was a cool guy and much too old for me. We could kiss a half hour at a time. Somehow, I learned to breathe through my nose then.

I remember the girl scout toup meetings on Post Office Avenue, the soda fountain at Gravelles where once a year or so we might get a coca cola or an ice cream sundae. I remember the Safeway near Route 1 where my dad had worked as a bagging clerk for a short time. I remember Block's department store where a friend of my mother's was asked what size jock strap her son wore and she made a circle with her right thumb and forefinger and said "about this size". I remember going to Block's for our gym uniforms which

were a dark blue one piece short jump suit. From age 5, I roller skated endlessly up and down Main Street and frequently scraped my knees on many falls until I got proficient.

I will mention briefly (this can be censored) that although I had a couple of close friends who gave me tacit support, I was hounded often in high school. I guess I never will understand unkindnesses but at my age now, I know that it happens to many of us who do not reveal their personal stories.

Nice memories are: Sledding down the hill at 7th and Main Street and walking a block or two home to obtain dry mittens and going back to the hill again. Ice skating on the lake at Cherry Lane which was in the middle of the woods back then. Parties at the mansion (of the parents of classmates) owned by Mr and Mrs CY Stephens. Church outings at the C and O canal. Waiting tables at church and Masonic dinners. Ice cream specials at Weile's in Langley Park. Going to Hutzlers in Baltimore every August and March for new clothes. Meeting Hopalong Cassidy in the Hutzler's Parking lot. Eating Chow Mein with my mother at Hoschild's on these occasion. Vacations with my father and mother in Quebec and Florida and Salisbury.

I have a few pictures of people on Main Street Laurel. Because, I travel, I will have to go through my possessions when I return to Laurel to retrieve them for the museum.

Genie Zacharias McGarry