

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: Faye Beall Green Date: March 2, 2009

Tell us your story...

Living in the 50's - Laurel Style

Our family names are included in Laurel history for many generations before we got to the 50's -- Beall, Poe, Watts, -- and related to Pritchard, Fulton, Fairall, Harrison, Phelps, too. But, my time was the fifties! Entering Laurel Elementary School in 1945 and graduating from Laurel High School in 1957. It was the grandest time to be young and live Laurel.

I lived in the west end of town where staunch Scot-Irish immigrants had put their mark on the last few blocks - 9th, 10th and 11th Streets - and stretched up Sandy Spring Road and Brooklyn Bridge Road. My relatives lived in many of the homes and because I was not always sure who were my relatives, I was subject to correction and direction from any and all of them. Our neighborhood included the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department and our fathers, grandfathers, brothers and uncles manned those mighty machine. The whistle blew and our beds were emptied, dinners were forgotten and chores were delayed. To see a fireman moving like lightning, cutting through yards and down alleyways to the firehouse on the corner of Montgomery Street and 9th Streets was commonplace. The families in the west end gathered on the corner on Decoration Day for the Fireman's Parade to Ivy Hill Cemetery and the excitement was beyond description. I remember the fire trucks, the marching men and women of the Fire Department, the military units and bands from Ft. Meade. That feeling of excitement, pride and patriotism comes forth in me every time I see men in uniform or get to a parade. It was on the corner of 10th and Montgomery Street, Laurel, Maryland, that my sense of belonging to community and nation became a part of who I am.

The firemen also gave the town it's most exciting event each summer - The Fireman's Carnival. We saved our money, did chores and returned bottles for deposit, to spend at the carnival. Starting at the Kitty cars when we were young to the giant Ferris wheel as teenagers. It was such a feeling of freedom walking around the grounds with friends and maybe 25 cents in our pocket!

In the 50's (I am not sure of the year) the Laurel Swimming Pool opened. Up until that happy day, I swam in the Patuxant River at the old dam where the current rushed over the rocks and made for swimming excitement. The Patuxant had many swimming holes along its path from the northwest into town. There was High Rock, Warren's Cabin, Rocky Bottom and finally the Old Dam. I am sure it wasn't very safe but every child has a swimming hole in memory. Even after the new swimming pool became the center of youth activity, the river would call for occasional plunges into the excitement of it's current especially when the cost of admission to the pool was not in hand.

Our Class of 1957, Laurel High School, gather often and try to define what made our youth so special in Laurel at that time; it is a favorite topic of discussion. We talk of the things we did for fun - especially basketball and football games. We dressed alike. Bobby socks, penny loafers, saddle shoes or Keds. The boys wore jeans. The girls wore wide skirts with plenty of crinoline. Girls wore jeans to the games, not to school. A poodle skirt was admired but not all of us had one. A picture of a girl in a pastel sweater with a string of pearls and modest length skirt hung in the hallway near the school office to advise us on the proper attire. Money was scarce and if we saved some, it was to buy Elvis records, not poodle skirts. The movie Grease pretty much describes the scene at Laurel High School and I think that is why I love to see it to this day.

It was March 21, 1956 that Elvis made his one and only appearance in Washington DC. He would be on the Wilson Line - a showboat that went up and down the Potomac River. The plan was hatched to go to see him and several carloads of teenage Elvis fans excitedly left Laurel for a night to remember. The tickets were over sold for the show and, because there were too many passengers on the boat, it never left the dock. That was fine with us. Elvis would sing and we would hear him....except we could not hear him. The girls squealed and screamed the whole time he was on stage. Maybe I screamed too! It was wonderful. The room was not large and we felt so close to our idol. After the show, they took Elvis to the galley area and put him behind a serving counter. Everyone was allowed to pass in front of him, speak and get his autograph. That autograph is one of my treasures to this day. One of our girls was brave enough to ask for a kiss - and got it! Soon after this time, Elvis became so popular that he could not mingle with crowds or give autographs at concerts. We were so lucky!

The Class of 1957 is still a group of friends. We are still part of the whole that was our life in Laurel during the 50's. Why is this? Our individual memories are sometimes conflicted...as memories often are, but our common thread was

community...and surprisingly enough, safety. We were comfortable with each other and secure in our town. We could move around safely, most faces were familiar and we liked to do things in groups. We could always find someone to help us if we needed anything. And most of all, we could trust each other. We have a love for each other that makes us family.

There was room for mistakes and room for exceptions to the rule as well as room for the unconventional and outlandish. Some of those unconventional ideas became more acceptable at our reunions than they were back in the 50's! We grew up to realize that we had learned much in our basic education and the human training ground - Shake, Rattle N' Roll, Laurel in the 1950's.