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Two of the twelve members of the board of education can remember when both junior and senior high were housed in the East Street School. I'm one of them, so I guess that makes me an oldtimer. But when we moved to New Milford back in the thirties, we were rank newcomers--and we stayed newcomers for a good many years.

My father was office manager at Sunny Valley Farm, which bottled its own milk and delivered door-to-door to its customers. After a brief stay in Riverview Court in what is still known in the family as the "cold house" and a longer stretch on Park Lane, we moved into the converted duplex on Wellsville Avenue that my father bought nearly twenty years later. By that time Sunny Valley had closed down its retail dairy operations, and he was managing the old New Milford Oil Company and solidly enough established to be allowed to talk at town meetings.

The town was much smaller in those days, maybe 4500 people; when you walked down Main Street you knew everyone you met and they knew you. There wasn't much privacy, but the instant recognition did make for a sense of security and a feeling of belonging. Kids got into plenty of mischief the way kids always do--the lady who lived down the street had chicken coops in the backyard and we used to duck into them during games of hide and seek, stirring up the hens and reducing the egg production--but nobody tore up flowers by the roots or wrecked the picnic tables at the town park. They were our flowers, our picnic tables, our parks, and it didn't occur to us to destroy them.

Lynn Deming opened shortly after we came to New Milford, and along with a lot of other families we used to go up there every summer evening when the men got home from work. We'd paddle around with our friends in

the shallow water roped off for the children, wriggle out of damp bathing suits and don dry shorts under the shelter of a big towel, eat sandwiches the mothers had packed in wicker picnic baskets, and build sandcastles while the grownups talked grownup talk until the sun set on the other side of the lake and it was time to go home to bed. It seemed like the whole town was up there but the only time the beach was really crowded was on the Fourth of July. We always had a family picnic, with friends and relatives driving over from Waterbury, and my mother would have to get up early to stake out a claim to our favorite table, down by the south end close to the water but far enough away from the swimming area so the grownups didn't have to watch the kids every minute.

Some people were scattered around on the farms and up in Northville and Gaylordsville, but most of us lived around the center of town. The men took the cars to work and the women walked downtown to do their shopping. The kids walked too: to school, to the skating pond in the winter, the movies on Saturday, and Young's Field where the high school played six-man football on Friday afternoon. We seemed to lose as many games as we won but the spectators never seemed to care; they were mostly kids--the grownups were all at work; win, lose or draw, there wasn't a single boo: the players after all were our friends and we knew they were doing their best.

The teachers all lived in town, and most of them had been around a long time. There weren't any guidance counselors but they weren't really needed; when a kid acted up the teachers didn't have to be told his mother had died or his father drank or had just lost his job. There weren't any truants either. The superintendent and the principal shared a tiny office to the left of the main staircase, strategically located so they could pop

out to glare at a latecomer trying to creep undetected into class or a truant skipping out early.

While I was away in college the town started to grow. The Robertson Bleachery & Dye Works shut down, so there weren't any more lengths of snowy white cotton to cover the tables at church suppers; more important, for a lot of people there weren't any more jobs. The chamber of commerce set out to recruit some new industry, and pretty soon the new Kimberly Clark and Scovill plants opened their doors. By the time I returned in the late fifties the developers had moved in and replaced most of the hayfields and cornstalks with ranches and split-levels, Grant's and the First National had moved off Bank Street into big modern buildings on Main Street (where the mall and the post office are now), and the small town I grew up in was no more.

The growth brought new opportunities and wider horizons. There's a lot more variety today: more jobs and stores, modern schools with vast playgrounds and armies of guidance counselors; there are even more churches. No matter what your interests are, you can find somebody who shares them. It's still a good town, a good place to live and to raise your kids, and I wouldn't want to go back to the old days. But sometimes I wonder. I take my nieces and nephews up to Lynn Deming on a hot Sunday afternoon and there's scarcely room to spread a blanket on the sand. The seniors march across the high school football field to receive their diplomas and I only recognize one out of ten names. Those are the times when I wonder if we haven't lost some of that sense of identity and belonging that made us a community and that somehow seems to elude us today.