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Nostalgia

I have two home towns, Dallas, Texas, and Richmond, Virginia. They are obviously different in size and location but have a surprising number of similarities. Although located on different longitudes and latitudes, they have amazingly similar climates, frequently influenced by the same weather systems, several days apart and changing only slightly in their eastward trek. The greatest differences in weather occur in summer, when Dallas is far warmer (actually "hot" in August) and Richmond is far more humid. Neither, to my mind, has a summer climate to boast about. In the winter, Dallas often has more snow and ice than Richmond, a source of disappointment to Roland who looked forward to a "northern" winter when we moved north to Richmond from Dallas.

A big difference between the two cities can be seen in their general attitudes toward change. Richmond residents tend to resist change, especially if it involves destruction or alteration of anything old. Dallas residents, on the other hand, have always seemed to seek change as a good thing in itself. Consequently, over the years since we left, Paul and I have seen many changes in landmarks as we've visited Dallas and tried to find our way about.

In a city which has grown in twenty-five years as fast as Dallas has, from roughly the same size as Richmond, into a mega region of more than two million people, we knew from past visits that some of our landmarks in Dallas would have been replaced by new structures. In fact, the last time we were there, we spent too much time being lost on streets whose names were familiar. This time we provided ourselves with a city map to facilitate our driving about. Alas, Dallas has grown so fast in a northern direction that our map did not include George's new home or some of the east-west crosstown streets that we needed. There were many more thoroughfares, much more traffic, and many large buildings replacing the houses and buildings we once knew.

We set out recently on two mornings to discover just exactly what had happened to our old schools and neighborhoods. We grew up in a city where there was little sentimentality about buildings. For instance, we had heard that a distinctive feature I looked for as a child because it signaled that we were almost downtown, the old Medical Arts Building, had been razed and replaced by a large skyscraper. No longer could we expect to see that square building of some twenty stories topped by a distinctive green tiled roof. Progress, we knew, could be expected in the crowded business section of town, but what about the residential neighborhoods where our lives had once been centered?

We had the time on two mornings to explore where and as we wanted to, and we sought out our old neighborhoods. The first morning took us by 5726 Morningside, where I lived from ages six to nineteen. It was an interesting experience. The small trees, some live oaks and at least one pecan tree, which householders had carefully nurtured during my life there, have matured into attractive, large trees, bridging the street for at least half of the block.

The Derbys' house, next door, was once almost obscured by several tall trees and many dense bushes. The bushes are gone and only one tree survives. It is a very handsome, tall (by Dallas standards) oak, setting off the almost unrecognizable two-story dark red brick house, now painted a creamy buff color. Our house, next door, is still the same color as it was in the twenties, a one-story orangey-red brick, except that a stockade fence abuts the front wall and extends to the property line next door, blocking the driveway, thereby changing its appearance. That driveway was nervous-making when we lived there. It consisted of two strips of concrete running from the street to the single garage at the back of the lot, the right runner not more than ten inches from the wall of the house. We had to be very careful to stay on the narrow runways in entering and especially in backing from the garage, the wall of the house being so close.



The most amazing change to the appearance of the property is the gigantic pecan tree, one of two that Daddy planted in 1926 in the parkway between the street and sidewalk. I remember it, with its partner, as a slowly growing tree that did not reach more than twelve feet in the air with a span barely larger than the six-foot wide parkway where it was planted. To my great disappointment it never produced pecans while we lived there, although it did bloom every spring. It is now some thirty feet tall and shades the sidewalk and most of the street. I wonder if the sidewalk and street are now littered with large, paper-shell pecans in the fall.

We drove on several blocks to see Robert E. Lee Elementary School, where I went to school, located at the east end of what was then a playground covering the rest of the block. Now there are new buildings on the western end of the block, with an addition of what must be a gymnasium to the back of the original school. But the front was a thrill, for its ugly two-story, concrete-block facade looks exactly as it did in the twenties and thirties. I would have no difficulty in locating the rooms of Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Bone, Dovie Lou Bullion, and Gladys Walters, my favorite teachers during my six years there.

Our next destination was L. L. Hotchkiss School, where George and Roland spent their elementary years. The building, which has changed very little in twenty-five years, is now partially obscured by twelve temporary huts on what formerly was the baseball diamond. The school was only half filled when the boys were there; obviously, an explosion of school-aged children in the district has occurred since we left.

On the second street over from Hotchkiss, Wild Valley Drive, we discovered that more trees had grown large enough almost to obscure the Holts' house, two doors from 7317 where we lived with our boys for eighteen years. Our formerly light red brick house has been painted an attractive off-white color, possibly to mask a difference in brick which occurred when our double sliding-glass doors were replaced with two shoulder-high windows. That alteration does change the appearance of the house. And our favorite planting of the large umbrella palm plant in the ell before the front entrance is gone. The small grove of persimmon trees in the front yard seems not to have changed at all. Next door, the Kitchens' house, which had a similar appearance to our house, now has an odd-looking second story added to the carport; it looks as though an encouraging wind might help it take to the air.



We found the first big change when we searched for the one-story brick house on Rosedale where we lived for five years. Like many other small houses in University Park, it has been replaced by a large two-story brick and stone house. Instead of being the middle of three cottages, it is the last house before a substantial brick barrier separating the residential street from the enlarged Central Expressway. Across from the multi-laned Expressway runs the new DART railway which goes underground for part of its length on the way to downtown Dallas and beyond. Four-year-old George used to stand in the front window of his bedroom and watch for rear-end collisions of cars trying to enter the short acceleration lane into the two-lane, overcrowded expressway.

The tiny Airline Drive house we occupied for a year while George was learning to walk has also been replaced by a grand two-story house. All property in University Park and Highland Park, two independent towns entirely surrounded by Dallas, is now so valuable that people have bought modest houses on fifty- or seventy-five-foot lots, razed the houses, and built zero-lot-line homes of impressive dimensions. The Airline Drive house is in University Park but has behind it a railroad spur servicing Mrs. Baird's Bread, a large commercial bakery. Apparently, it is no longer a less than desirable property.

On our second tour, we found more changes in the parts of town where Paul grew up. Formerly out from the downtown area of Dallas, those sections are now part of the downtown district itself. We could not find any of the houses whose addresses he remembered; most of the lots now feature large business buildings. However, his elementary school, William B. Travis, and high school, North Dallas High, are still in splendid condition and are obviously serving their original uses. Then when we drove up the slight incline of Hall Street to McKinney Avenue, Paul received his biggest surprise. He was delighted to see the recognizable, well-maintained walls of the drug store where he worked as a soda jerk and bicycle delivery boy during his high school years. The location now houses a restaurant with a delightful patio between the former drugstore and the next building. We sat under an umbrella there while enjoying a delicious meal. The boys and girls waiting tables at this charming Bread Winner Restaurant seemed delighted to hear about the former life of the location and Paul's role in it. In fact, we found all the service people in Dallas to be very friendly.



We had already visited friends still on the faculty at Southern Methodist University, which has added many buildings since we left, but the Heroy Building where Paul chaired the Statistics Department has not changed.

Looking back, we find that the highlight of our nostalgia forays into various neighborhoods was the former North Dallas Pharmacy on McKinney Avenue where Paul

worked so long ago and where we had such a memorable meal in the buildings' current incarnation. We were glad to discover that some of our landmarks had not changed.

Traffic in Dallas is heavy at all times of day, and the distances are so much greater than the ones we're accustomed to in Richmond that we seemed to be on the road going somewhere a good part of the time. We were caught in a rush hour traffic jam once that made the congestion of Richmond streets seem minor. We know that, of course, Dallas will always be "home," even though it's now a home we like to visit - but not to live in.