

When I was old enough to attend Girls Latin School at age twelve, in 1964, I was old enough as well to take the bus there alone in the morning. It was quite a trek to Codman Square each day. I left my house to trudge to the bus stop on the corner of Center and Bellvue Streets no later than 6:30 AM. I would take the Charles River bus to Roslindale Square, where I had a five to fifteen minute wait for the Mattapan Square bus which ran every fifteen minutes at that time. I disembarked, crossed the street, and always had time for a coke and a pack of chocolate chip cookies at the corner coffee shop. Snug inside, I could wait cozily for the bus. When it arrived, I stuffed the rest of my cookies in my jacket and made a run for it. I then rode with my thoughts for company to Mattapan Square, where I boarded a bus for Ashmont Station. At Ashmont, I awaited the bus to Codman Square wherein was housed the old Girls' Latin School and its annex, two monstrous yellow brick buildings, connected by a walkway. Each had four floors and a basement; this meant getting from class to class was never easy. But that is grist for another tale or two! Back to my story:

If I were old enough to travel such a distance, I was old enough to travel to the VFW on my bike, and I did. Actually, quite often in the summer of 1964, before Latin started. I shopped at the first department store in the area: Sandy's (no relation). I remember it to this day. It was located where the Super Stop and Shop is now, behind the pet store. There was a hot dog stand and pop corn machine which greeted you before the checkout area. On the far right wall was the record section, with LP's and 45's. In the back were the clothes and the fitting rooms. There were also toys, books, accessories, and other household items. It was huge, inexpensive, but not very clean. Still, on my bike at age 12, this was the farthest I could travel. I bought my first handbag and school clothes which I picked out myself. I bought nylons and shoes and a book strap. I never owned a book bag. Why I shall never know.

Across the street there was no West Roxbury High School because it had not yet been built, nor was there Havey Beach any longer. It had decayed. It was only a few short years later that the song "Down by the River, Down by the banks of the River Charles" was to become famous. It brought tears to my eyes. I had loved Havey Beach from about the age of six or so. My mother did not work in those days and she brought us almost every day over the summer. We had only one car which my father used, so we had to take the bus and then walk, which we did. Or we went with friends. No matter. It was worth it. The sun was hot, the sand was white, the water was refreshing, and the pop corn machine was not far away. It was a huge stretch of beach, but I recall it always being crowded. We brought our lunches and then ate contentedly after swimming for a bit. Our parents were terrified of cramps, so we had to wait at least a half hour before we swam. What a boring wait. We often filled it with our favorite guessing game: What would the drive-in movie across the street be showing that evening?

The drive-in had been a part of my life since I was a toddler. When we were very small, our parents bundled my brother and me up in our pj's and packed us in the car with a jug of juice in hand. We arrived at the drive-in about twilight time and played on the merry-go-round and swings till dusk, when the movies started and by which time we were exhausted. It was so much fun to go out in our pj's!!

The movie started, the sun went down, the lights went on, and we were dragged back to the car. And there was "speaker fun"—trying to get the car close enough to the speakers so that we could get them

in the window, but far enough away so that one of us could sneak out to the rest rooms if need be. Our one car was always a two-door for the sake of safety (I never even knew that four doors existed!), so it was a challenge to find just the right distance for the speakers and their cumbersome wires. Nevertheless, I do remember their falling out at the most inconvenient times.

There was always a double feature and the best part was the in-between ten-minute featurette—always the same—with talking hot dogs, dancing pizzas, singing hamburgers, giggling sodas, and jolly ice cream cones. What a mouth-watering temptation that was. We always awoke at that part if by chance we had been dozing and begged to get refreshments. There was ever-present a constantly ticking clock in the corner of the screen reminding us relentlessly that we had six minutes left (and counting) til the next feature began. The lines were horrendously long and we never made it back on time. The lights would go off, the movie would start, and we could never find our way back to the car. Either my father found us with a flashlight (invariably dropping the speaker on his toe and screeching for a bit), or they would see us and start screaming “Over here!” to the dismay of their neighbors who vociferously voiced their disapproval of the serenade. As in “Hey! Shut up over there. Can’t you see we’re trying to watch the movie?” That usually helped my brother and me to focus and find our parents. We were thrilled, but I seriously doubt our fellow cinema citizens were as pleased.

Just a year or two later came the biggest treat ever imaginable to any child and was located where the new Dunkin Donuts is now: Howdy’s!!! It was the precursor to McDonald’s which had not yet made its way to West Roxbury. This would have been about 1962 or so. You waited in line and then ate in your car or a picnic bench, but there were only two, so the latter option usually was not the viable one. Hamburgers (one size only) were twelve cents, French fries were eight cents, and sodas were ten cents. Those were at first the only choices. We went every day. We walked, we rode our bikes, we took the bus—but we got there. By the time it closed about eight years later to be eclipsed by McDonald’s, the prices were twenty-two cents for the hamburger, fifteen for the fries, and eighteen cents for the sodas. Still a bargain for the taste buds and the pocketbooks.

Sandi Serkess can be reached at sserkess@juno.com

