

My Fathers Drug Store

By Mildred Rowland Reinhardt

Although Mayme Jackson, telephone operator had attained the distinction of being nearly indispensable in the town, no one, it seemed to me played a more important role in the vicinity than my father. Everyone in our town of Gary, South Dakota and for miles around held him in the highest regard. A handsome man of high intellect and integrity and with an amiable nature, Walter Rowland was the Town Druggist, Clerk of the School Board, treasurer of the Town Board and eventually Grand Master of the Odd Fellow Lodge. The latter was a position he devoutly cherished.

He gave willing counsel to anyone needing assistance and was executor of innumerable widow's affairs. Of all the headaches he encountered, he never refused a request to assist the elderly or the infirm and to my knowledge never accepted a penny of compensation for his time and trouble.

He worked incredibly long hours at the store, weekdays and until midnight on Farmers nights which were Wednesdays and Saturdays in the spring, Summer and Fall. And he worked half a day on Sundays. Often too he was called in the middle of the night, regardless of the weather, to put up emergency medicines for persons who were ill and many times for those who proved to be poor pay as well.

My mother, my brother Charles, two years older than me, and I, all of us adored him. His decisions on major matters were just and the final word, though in everyday catastrophes Mother had the say.

It wasn't until Charles was in the Fifth Grade that he began clerking in the drugstore. But much earlier than that we felt an affinity to the place. What splendid items there were there. We were proud to have a father who was the proprietor of such a grand establishment.

Inside the big plate glass door to the left was the voluminous magazine rack, colorful and exciting with pictures and stories about current best sellers on sale. There was a veneered walnut cabinet containing 78 rpm records of the latest hits and a wind up phonograph to try them out on. And Dad sold Fada Radios. He was the first to put up radios for sale in town.

There were birthday and other greeting cards of delicate hues and sentimental verse, boxes of them. There was the tobacco showcase dazzling in its array of boxed cigars, Rio Tan and White Owl and many others. There were intriguing styles of pipes and fragrant tobaccos in boxes and tins. The showcase beside it displayed exotically scented toiletries and notions, sachet, oils, always the latest in Evening in Paris and Coty concoctions. Behind all this splendid display were shelves the entire length of the store with bottles of patent medicines of every conceivable variety and purpose. There was even a cherry medicine for treating bronchial disorders in horses, patented in Dad's name.

Atop a huge black safe were his trusty pestle and mortar and sensitive scales; vital instruments in measuring and preparing prescriptions. Inside the safe were stacked his business documents.

At the back of the store were more medicines, his office and prescriptions desk. On the other side of the store situated discreetly to the rear, in heavy oak drawers were the more intimate articles of personal hygiene, protection and comfort.

There was another display counter, one of boxed stationery, a galaxy of color and texture. Some were smooth, some embossed and some sheer of delicate quality, in frosty pinks and peach, dainty shades of yellow and blue and Nile green. There were packs of typing paper and of colored construction paper, mats of tissue and crepe paper in rainbow colors.

Also towards the back of the store there were three hulking sample wallpaper books offering the most modern patterns, which Dad ordered for customers according to their individual specifications. On the arrival he trimmed it just so on an intricate-looking machine that stood in the basement.

Next to the stationery was the confectionery counter with the chocolate kisses wrapped in foil, the see-through red cardboard boxes of licorice cigarettes, plump penny suckers, lemon drops, translucent butterscotch discs, sugared horehound lozenges, nickel candy bars, nickel packs of Black Jack, Juicy Fruit, Teaberry and Spearmint gum. Individual and unwrapped candies were displayed in covered glass jars and sold by the pound. Wedges of fudge were sometimes stacked in pyramids on square plates of pressed glass and of handsome design, if a special occasion warranted such elegance. The other confections were enticingly displayed inside a long glass showcase.

Most marvelous of all, though, was the gleaming chrome and marble soda fountain backed by a mirror, the full length. In front of the mirror on the gray and white marble shelf were stacked glistening pyramids; the heavy swirled-glass soda and malt glasses, the squat-stemmed ice cream dishes appealingly reflected in the mirror. The malted milk mixer, solid chrome, stood splendid, beside them and then there were the individual spigots that gushed out the chocolate and pure fruit toppings, the cola and root beer syrups and the fizz water that Dad generated in the basement. The black chrome topped eight-holer freezer stood over at the side. It was packed with the rich thick fruited strawberry ice cream and cherry, chocolate, vanilla, maple nut; each of the extraordinary texture and color. There might be butter brickle, orange sherbet or tutu-fruitti, but the first five flavors were basic.

Towards the center back of the store and easily accessible for the more leisurely soda fountain crowd, were two polished red mahogany booths and two round oak ice cream tables and chairs with wooden tops and curved wrought iron legs. The large table was for the adults and small of the identical design was for the children.

Dad made us feel welcome to get ourselves a treat and one for a friend whenever we felt the need. We never indiscriminately gorged on the ice cream concoctions or the confections, probably because we respected our privilege of not being restricted. Each thumb licking cone of ice cream or rich chocolate malt or whatever it happened to be, never failed to be as special as the first had been.

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