

They Bloom Without Me

Because my husband Jerry had booked his trip to Greece and Turkey long before we moved to Thompson, we found our selves going back to Ontario only three weeks after we had settled into our new home. Hardly enough time had passed for any one to miss us, I imagine. So while Jerry flew off to Europe, I picked up my rental car at the airport and went to visit family and friends. The first stop was to Sarnia, Jerry's home town, to spend some time with my son and his family. Then a couple days with friends in Oakville, before heading to Trout Creek, where my parents and other family members live, before dashing over to Sudbury to visit my daughter and her family.

As I traveled north on scenic highway 11, I was struck by how things have changed, but have yet stayed so much the same. The highway went down to two lanes at Burks Falls, until a little ways past South River where it once again reverts back to the new four lane version. It evoked memories of the bus ride to and from Almaguin Highlands Secondary School, and time spent with friends during those years. We thought nothing of boldly putting out our thumbs and catching a ride from one town to another, just for something to do. I sure wouldn't do that now. But then it is a different world these days; or perhaps I am just more aware now of what can happen, when you take rides from strangers.

Cruising through Sunridge and South River, I watched folks going about their everyday business. It was a whole new generation going on about their lives in that timeless way that people do: pumping gas into their cars, picking up groceries, stopping to chat with friends, or get a cup of coffee at the local diner. By the time I had crossed the South River and drove over the top of the hill, the road had changed back to a four lane highway, and it was a new road for me once again until I found the exit for Trout Creek.

The old high way 11 looked the same as I approached Trout Creek, but it certainly felt different. It was no longer a major route connecting northern communities with the south, just another street in a small town. I think I only met one other car as I approached the intersection to turn onto the main street. It reminded me of times that I would have a dream, that I was talking to someone I knew, but I didn't believe it was them, because they didn't *feel* right. And yet so many things *are* still the same. Most of the businesses that I remember still exist, in one form or another.

The general store is still there on the corner of the highway and the main street, but now one of my childhood friends and her family, own and operate it. I see her now and then when I am in town visiting my parents. The planing mill is still there as well. We would often go there and ask for empty pop bottles. Back then we would return them to the store so we could buy candy and other things. I noticed that the canoe building business that another friend's family owned, seems to have evolved into something new. TJ's is still a restaurant, (I remember some friends and I were once strongly asked to leave that establishment) but they had motel rooms added on sometime ago. The Princess Motel and the restaurant, where I had worked as a dishwasher one summer, is also still serving the community.

The public school that I attended, has not been holding classes for many years now. For a few years I had noticed whenever I drove by, that it was a public library. On my last visit to see my parents, it looked like an apartment building of some kind.

Not many changes at the community center, it looks pretty much the same. My first summer job was working to help build that arena. I think they hired my friend and I, because we were hanging around so she could flirt with my cousin who worked there. She didn't stay more than a couple of days, but I worked until they ran out of things I could do. It only took me about two hours to spend what I worked several hard, sweaty weeks to earn.

Most times that I come back for a visit, the only folks that I know anymore are my family, and a handful of friends. Places don't remember you, but you sure remember them long after you move on. That saying, "you can't go back," it is so true. The world keeps turning, flowers keep blooming, buildings fall and are rebuilt, and generations of people come and go. I guess all that we truly have is *now*. And people and places can only remain unchanged, in your heart.

As I drove down Hwy 69 to catch my flight back to Manitoba, I thought about how I would miss the Trilliums blooming in the spring here. No worries; I saw that they were out in bloom further south by London. I will miss seeing them. I'm not sure if they have Trilliums in Manitoba, and I doubt there would be any, as far north as Thompson. But it makes me smile to know that with or without me there, the Trilliums will bloom every spring in Ontario.

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