

Shopping - Then and Now

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Just over 60 years ago, and 5 years before construction began on the Queensway, Ottawa's first shopping mall opened on May 12, 1955. Located in the city's "west end", it consisted of twenty three shops and services, and was heavily advertised on the radio. Parking for 1200 cars. Imagine!

By the time I was old enough to be one of their junior customers, Westgate Shopping Centre was already six years old.

Often, during the summer holidays I would bike over to the mall with Judy and Karen, a couple of my ten year old friends. First stop was Kresge's, the fifties version of a dollar store. We thought it was a wonderland. Kresge's sold cheap makeup, costume jewelry, clothes, hardware and toys. They had a pet department where we could pick up a turtle (we all had one,) a goldfish or a budgie. It was a great place to buy Christmas gifts for our parents, like fancy soap in a ceramic dish or plaster of paris figures to hang on the wall.

Next, we hit Toy World, with its cut out pink elephant on the wall. They sold hula hoops, board games, view masters and most importantly, the latest in the creepy Nancy Drew mystery series. We circulated our Nancy Drew books and we had all finished "The Mystery of the Ivory Charm". Judy's birthday was coming up, and she planned to ask for the newest book on the list, "The Whispering Statue". We couldn't wait to find out the plot of that one. How could a statue whisper, and what was she whispering about?

By this time we were hungry and Fenton's Bakery was the next stop on our route. We stared through the gleaming glass case at the brownies, date squares and flowery birthday cakes. Even though the chocolate chip and peanut butter cookies were tempting, our orders were always the same: "One cream puff please." We took our little white paper bags out to the sidewalk and happily polished off the cream puffs on our way to Friemans'.

Friemans was a fun store for ten year olds. We could ride the escalator, explore all the departments and check out the snow cone machines and toy trains in the Christmas display. It became even more important to us three years later when, as Beatle maniacs, we hung around the record department waiting for the newest British albums and admiring the display of transistor radios in their leather cases. Friemans sold all the latest fashion gear such as leather John Lennon caps, patterned nylons and miniskirts.

Our Saturday shopping excursions started with Friemans, then we stopped in at the Milk Bar for an ice cream cone or a rich creamy chocolate milkshake. Lewis Shoes was next, where we wasted the friendly clerk's time checking out the squash heels and the desert boots. The Anna Lee Shop had the classy dressy clothes that we loved but could rarely afford. We passed by the Miss Westgate restaurant which was out of our league, and headed straight for Throop's drugstore where the lunch counter served the best cheeseburgers. After stuffing our faces once again, we set out for home gabbing about our fun day and planning what to buy on our next trip to Westgate.