

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

A glimpse at teen life in Ripon in the 1950s and '60s

In the Jan. 29, 1975 edition of the *Ripon Commonwealth Press*, Marcia Bentley Buhrow (1943-1991) was interviewed by reporter Pat Slattery about her memories of going to high school in Ripon during the 1950s and early 1960s.

The article noted that this was a time in America that "Elvis was scandalizing the country with his gyrating pelvis and suggestive lyrics. Girls used to print 'E.P.' all over their bodies." But Buhrow related that growing up in the 1950s was full of innocent, pure and simple fun.

Buhrow graduated from Ripon High School in 1961 and told the *Commonwealth* that "Her youthful years in Ripon were filled with happy days" and that "Ripon had a lot of places to hang out if you were a kid growing up in Ripon."

She noted that Saturdays were spent at the afternoon matinees at the Campus Theatre. The Campus Theatre, 103 Watson St., was founded in 1935 and is the first of the Marcus Theater chain.

Advertisements for the Campus Theatre in the *Commonwealth* from 1958, Buhrow's freshman year in high school, show that matinees cost between 25 and 35 cents for children (equal to \$2.83 to \$4 today) and 45 cents



THIS GRADUATION photo of Marcia Bentley Buhrow was found in the 1961 Ripon High School Tiger yearbook. submitted photo

to 50 cents for students (equal to \$5 to \$5.65 today).

Buhrow related that "the jocks" would go to Warren Sherman's Sporting Goods store to rehash their athletic games. The only sporting goods store mentioned in the Ripon telephone directory of that time was the Ripon Sport Shop at 103 W. Fond du Lac St., the current location of Ryhan Boutique.

She stated that the older teenage boys would go to Liberty Pool Room, which sometimes was referred to as Big Al's. The Liberty Billiard Room was located at 221 Watson St., currently the site of The Crimson Still Cocktail Co. Buhrow went on to say that if the boys didn't have money, the owner would chase them out and the boys would then stand on the sidewalk and watch passing cars.

Buhrow added that Ripon had four soda fountains in the



RIPON HAD SEVERAL soda fountains in the 1950s and early 1960s. This 1951 photograph shows the soda fountain in the Walgreens Agency Drug Store, which was located at 217 Watson St., the current home of Back Porch Gatherings. submitted photo

1950s. The 1950s were the "golden years" of soda fountains. Often found in pharmacies or restaurants, the fountains had started in the 19th century with a counter-service apparatus that dispensed carbonated soft drinks by mixing flavored syrup with chilled, carbonated water.

By the 1950s, the soda fountains also served bottled soft drinks like Coca-Cola, along with ice cream sundaes, shakes or malts, and sometimes food like hamburgers and French fries.

Marcia told the *Commonwealth* that "Hader's was a hangout for the teenybopper crowd.

There used to be so many bikes parked in front of Hader's after school that it created problems for pedestrians. The specialty of the house was 'the suicide,' a soda drink that was a combination of all flavors." Hader's Pharmacy was located at 329 Watson St., which now is home to J's BBQ.

Another soda fountain was in the Walgreens Agency Drug Store, which was located at 217 Watson St., the current location of Back Porch Gatherings. Buhrow noted that the Walgreens soda fountain was more often used by adults than teenagers.

In the basement of The Spot, 305 Watson St., half of the bar was a soda fountain, and Buhrow stated the other half "was for the over 18 crowd that wanted beer." She related that Blaine "Bud" Briesie (1919-1987), the owner, knew exactly

who was and wasn't old enough to drink.

"The initiation into adulthood in Ripon was being old enough to cross the dividing line and have a beer," Buhrow said told the *Commonwealth*.

In Wisconsin, 18-year-olds could legally drink beer (but not hard liquors) from 1935 until 1972. Many area bars and restaurants had "beer-only" bars for 18-year-olds during the 1960s and 1970s.

In March 1972, the legal drinking age to consume all types of alcohol was lowered to 18. In 1984, the minimum drinking age was increased from 18 to 19. In 1986, Wisconsin raised its drinking age to 21 to comply with the National Minimum Drinking Age Act.

Briesie and his wife, Marilyn Fortnum Briesie (1921-2014), opened The Spot Restaurant and Supper Club in 1950. After Bud passed away, Marilyn ran The Spot until she sold it in 1990. At one time, The Spot had a roller skating rink on its upper floor.

The fourth soda fountain that Buhrow remembered was popular with high school students and had several names: "Gus," "Mill's Grill," "the Maple Lunch" and "the Hop-In." The Ripon Telephone directories show this soda fountain at 102 Watson St., the current location of Roadhouse Pizza. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, this location is found in the Ripon telephone directory as Dick's Dairy Bar & Grill and Mills Grill.

Buhrow hung out in a clique of 15 girls called "the Vultures." The nickname came when a boy told them that the group of girls "hung around together like a bunch of vultures."

She noted that dress codes were strict and girls wore skirts below the knee with bobby socks. At that time, girls could not wear pants to school. Boys



THIS UNDATED PHOTOGRAPH shows Blaine "Bud" Briesie (1919-1987), cooking hamburgers. Briesie owed The Spot, 305 Watson St., along with his wife Marilyn Fortnum Briesie (1921-2014), from 1950 until 1990. In the basement of The Spot was a soda fountain next to an 18-year-old beer bar. Beer was legal to drink for 18-year-olds in Wisconsin from 1935 until 1984. At one time, The Spot had a roller-skating rink on its upper floor. submitted photo

wore baggy pants, and the athletes had crew-cut hair while the "hoods" wore ducktail hair styles. Buhrow reported that the boys in Ripon wore belts with little buckles on the back. If the buckle was closed, this indicated that he was going steady with a girl; if it was open the boy was free to date.

Buhrow and her friends, "The Vultures," watched the television show "American Bandstand" after school. American Bandstand started in 1952 and lasted until 1989.

Dick Clark started hosting the show in 1956 and it became a national sensation in 1957.

The show featured teenagers dancing to the top-40 hits and it shaped youth culture, fashion, as well as the popularity of rock and roll. In Ripon this television show would have been watched on a black and white TV as color televisions were very expensive and would not be seen in most homes until the mid-1960s.

The girls' activities were centered around Ripon High School. The high school Buhrow attended was built in 1939 and changed into the middle school when a new high school was built in 1963. It was razed in 2016 and the school's tennis courts are located where it once stood on Metomen Street.

Dances were held on Friday nights and Buhrow stated that the Vultures always attended athletic games.

The article informed that "Like most of other teens in the '50s, the Vultures did a lot of cruising. Scooping the loop was

highly popular."

To "Scoop the Loop," residents, as well as visitors, drove their cars through downtown Ripon "looping" around Rotary Square to head back south down Watson Street. Scooping the loop was banned in 1992 for various reasons, however, starting in 2019, the nostalgic activity is revived for one evening each summer. This year's Scoop the Loop event is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 1 from 5 to 8 p.m.

"Most Friday nights, we drag raced on Radio Road," Buhrow said.

Buhrow owned a 1952 Studebaker, however, she related in the article that the cars all teens wanted were Thunderbirds and 1957 Chevrolets.

She became a barber, and for many years owned and operated Roy's Barber Shop, located at 231 Watson St., which she ran with her father Roy Bently Sr. (1905-1986).

In 1971, Buhrow married Jerry Buhrow (1939-2021), who graduated from Ripon High School in 1957. They lived at 952 Ranson St., and Buhrow helped to raise two stepchildren.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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