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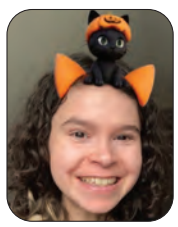

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The Carman-Dufferin Standard is published Thursdays and distributed as a free publication through Canada Post to 3,457 homes by BigandColourful Printing and Publishing.

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EDITORIAL > VIEWPOINTS > LETTERS

Prairie drive-ins connect generations

By Jennifer Lee

As long as I can remember, Syl's Drive Inn was there — a low-slung red-and-white landmark rimmed with yellow globe lights, the much-anticipated midway point between Winnipeg and my grandparents' home. As a child, I counted the minutes to Carman, already tasting burgers and fries before we set off again into the darkening prairie fields. It was a family ritual my mother and her parents shared years earlier on the long drives back to the farm after trips to the city.

This summer we brought our six-year-old son to Manitoba from Toronto for the first time. Syl's topped my list of experiences to share — the burgers and soft-serve cones of my childhood — and there we were at the same red picnic tables, surrounded by families lingering in the late-day sun. I felt both at home and, after decades away, a little out of place.

On those drives around Manitoba you're never far from a drive-in: the duelling dogs of Skinners and the Half Moon in Lockport; Ma's by the highway near Elm Creek; V.J.'s in downtown Winnipeg. Few places elsewhere have matched that feeling — the dusty, moth-freckled screens, stainless-steel counters with sliding windows, orders called into the open air over a tinny speaker. It's summertime magic.

Maybe it's our shorter prairie summers, when we savour every outdoor day. Maybe it's the long stretches between towns. Either way, drive-ins are less about food than about place. In small communities, they're social hubs — animated intersections in a province of wide-open spaces.

From Syl's picnic tables I noticed the Tim Hortons next door, a local institution beside a national giant. Cars cycled through the window, reminding me of Toronto nights when I barely pause for an iced coffee. But prairie drive-ins ask us to pause. They connect the dots: generations catching up over onion rings, kids racing to the playground, families lingering for one more round of mini-golf.

Without our family's history at Syl's, I might have missed what that window really serves. More than a Buzz burger, it's a view into the past and a tie to the present — a place our son now plays before we take that long road into a boundless prairie evening.

Jennifer Lee is a Winnipeg-born, Toronto-based writer and communications professional.

The way it was 100 years ago Oct. 30

By Dennis Young

100 years ago — 1925: RM grants DAS $3,600 to help with debt; Conservatives assured of a Dominion victory; Christie's Bake Shop suffers a fire; learn better letter writing at Carman Bible and Business Training School; postal rate for Manitoba, 1–3 lbs., is 15¢; Boyne River shows signs of freezing for skating; Harris's Clothier sells suits for $34.50 and A.F. Higgins for $27.50.

75 years ago — 1950: Of 1,174 eligible voters for town council, just 370 registered; Frank Harris returns as mayor; Shilson's Grocery sells packaged Rice Krispies with a plastic knife for 24¢; Boyne Theatre runs movies Monday to Saturday, including matinees; boars at a swine sale go for $88; Sperling's Legion holds a dance and bingo at the school hall; classifieds are full of horses for sale; Bruce Lowry and Hannes Vidal promote their Southern Electric; Safeway pumpkins are 5¢ per pound.

50 years ago — 1975: John Hildebrandt wins Ward 4 handily; Big Bore Shoot held at Bill Clark's; Carman Housing Authority conducts a survey to determine the need for senior units; Carduff Farmserve offers granular Avadex for 50¢ per acre; John Penner lists a '75 Dodge Dart for $4,500 at Laycock Motors; Kinsmen "Bring a Buddy" night was a success, says president Peter Sanderson; fire at John Murta's causes $40,000 loss in equipment and grain; 25 DAS members to attend the Western Canadian Fair Association convention in Regina.

25 years ago — 2000: Carman Beavers fold for the 2000-01 SEMHL season due to a shortage of players and executive members; Johnston Farm Supplies begins an 8,000-sq.-ft. expansion; Miami Co-op celebrates its 50th anniversary; the Chamber plans to install speakers to play Christmas music from the library bell tower; Homecoming 2000 committee announces a time capsule has been made; Carman RCMP seek applications for guardians for jail cells; Belfour voted to the 75th anniversary Chicago team; Curl for Cancer is a sell-out; The Holland Shop opens on 1st Ave. S.W.; town considers bidding for the 2006 Manitoba Games; Carman Area Foundation holds its first annual meeting.

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