



Small Towne Short Stories
Orange Daily News: Part I
By Amber Montgomery

When I reached out to former newsboys Leason Pomeroy, Bruce Kolina and Mike Costello I wanted to know what life was like in the Plaza almost 70 years ago—just after World War II had ended and before the small town of Orange had begun to boom.

I also sat down with local historian Phil Brigandi to help create a timeline of the former Orange Daily News building. He brought life to so many of the people who worked for the newspaper.

I also talked with Dave Mesesan, the manager at Rod's Liquor, who kindly gave me a tour around the building and satisfied my curiosity as to what was on the other side of that orange mural at the end of the alley.

Each person offered me something different—information, memories, stories, history. I even got lost in Orange Daily newspapers and photographs archived in the Orange Public Library's Local History database.

I decided there was no better place to start writing than 44 Plaza Square—what is now a Starbucks with the humble letters, "Orange Daily News" underneath the modern, bold emerald green lettering of the business that operates there today.

As I walked through the doors, I looked around. I saw college students from Chapman University working diligently on their laptops, a mess of papers scattered

in front of them. A few clusters of friends gossiping and laughing over lattes. I ordered a Venti Pike and a Pain au Chocolat.

"Warmed up, please," I requested.

"Name?"

"Amber."

While waiting near the pick-up counter I surveyed the ceiling, the windows, the view of the Plaza, the old worn brick, the bones of the place.

I imagined it lined with desks and rotary dial phones. I imagined writers, like myself, coming and going, the buzz of the local newspaper. Maybe the smell of coffee still hung in the air back in the 40s, or maybe a hint of cigarette. I could almost hear the newsboys chatting in the alley, folding their newspapers after school, the printing machines clanking in the background.

"Coffee for Amber," the barista called.

I picked up the hot paper cup and pastry, "Thanks."

I found a comfortable spot by a window. I looked out on the Plaza, busy as usual with people window shopping, mothers pushing strollers, students hurrying along with armfuls of books.

I pulled out my black and white speckled Meade Composition book and my pen. I took out my notes, the little map of the building that Leason drew for me in black Sharpie on crinkly white tracing paper and a few copies of photographs I had obtained from the late 1940s.

They say the first lines of a story are sometimes the hardest to write. I stared down at the blank page, but my eyes were drawn back to the scene around me. I imagined finger waves and victory rolls instead of beach waves and bangs, pleated pants instead of skinny jeans. All the stories from the last few weeks were slowly coming to life inside my head.

Maybe it's because I've seen too many movies or because I have an overactive imagination, but the whole Plaza—the buildings and the people all seemed to warp in time. As each car passed through the traffic roundabout I traveled through the 80s, the 60's—I pressed my pen to the paper.

* * *

Friday, September 12, 1947
7 a.m.

"Good morning, Bobby!"

"Mornin' Mom."

Robert Schilling's mother Florence was plain, but pretty, or at least he thought so. She had short, light brown hair she wore in curls and serene hazel eyes. She wore a cornflower blue dress with white trim around the collar and skirt. Florence was a seamstress and sewed all her own clothing. She always kept herself, the house and kids nice and neat. It was a wonder how she held everything together without Dad.

Bobby's father had been deployed to Belgium to fight the Nazis three years prior and died in combat. Things were different around the house without him. Quieter. Dad was always telling jokes. He had a way of keeping things light. He used to take Bobby and his brothers out to play catch or shoot or fish. Not a day went by that some memory didn't come back to Bobby of his time with his father.

Now it was just Mom and her four boys.

Life continued and it was now up to the oldest sons to bring in extra money and look after the household. Bobby's older brother Art had been working for a while and it was Bobby's turn to start making a contribution.

He was 11 years old and today was his first day of work. Some kids from his school had started working as newspaper boys after school. They took subscriptions, collected money and delivered papers for the Orange Daily News, the town's daily newspaper.

"You want some toast and jam? Gammie made some yesterday."

He loved his grandmother's jam. She and Grandy lived a few blocks away and grew red raspberries, blackberries and the biggest strawberries you'd ever seen. She would mix them with sugar and put them in pans covered with tin foil then set them out on her rooftop to cook in the hot, Southern California sun. It was heaven. They knew all the tricks to living in Orange. The couple had been there since what seemed to be the beginning of time, at least that's how Bobby felt.

It was like that with a lot of families who'd settled in Orange as much as two generations back and never found a reason to leave. It was a good town full of hard-working people—a tight-knit community. Even through the Depression and war, the majority of people here were doing alright and they owed a lot of it to the citrus groves.

"Remember to head straight to the newspaper after school; don't dillydally," said Bobby's mother. "Mr. Arguello said you could begin today. He said to go down the alley and through the doors on the side of the building. Don't forget."

Bobby grabbed a glass of milk and sat down at the table where his younger brother Joey was already sitting, no doubt trying to finish last-minute math homework before school started. Math wasn't Joey's favorite subject. He was eight years old and

usually managed to conveniently be missing or go unnoticed when it came to helping out around the house.

Bobby took a chug of his milk and stared at his brother.

"4, 8, 7, 2, 19, 21..."

Joey looked up.

"Knock it off!"

With a murderous look in his eyes, Joey got up and stormed into the living room. Bobby laughed to himself. *Idiot.*

Tom, the youngest, sauntered in through the back door with a little basket filled with eggs. His light brown hair was tousled and only one eye was open. He set the basket next to the stove and flopped his little body down at the kitchen table.

"Aren't you gonna wash 'em?" Bobby asked.

Silently, Tom pulled himself back out of his chair and carried the little basket over to the sink as Art made his way down the stairs. Art was 16 and went to Orange Union High School where he played baseball. He had just started working at Watson's Drug & Soda Fountain and had somewhat assumed the role of 'man of the house,' which annoyed Bobby. Art grabbed Bobby and punched him in the arm.

"Morning, twerp."

"Ow!" Bobby yelled and tried to take a swing at him, but missed.

A small scuffle ensued only to be broken up by Mom's perpetually sensible voice as she set the breakfast plates on the counter for each kid to grab.

"Okay boys, that's enough. Come get your breakfast."

* * *

After school Bobby walked to Olive Street and slipped through the loading dock door at John T. McInnes Printing. As he cruised through, he passed some of the newspaper staff gathered around the liquor store window on his left taking a break, drinking bottles of pop.

He could hear the linotype machines and printers whirring and tapping loudly inside as he continued into the brick lined alley outside the Orange Daily News building. 'News Alley' they called it on account of the newsboys who convened there every afternoon. Some older kids he knew from school folded papers and placed them in canvas, sling-type contraptions they wore over their shoulders. The canvas bags had big pockets in the front and back. He spotted a few of his friends: Johnny Warner,

Dave Garcia and his next door neighbor Jack Piper. Their hands and clothes were smudged with black ink.

"Hiya, Bob."

"Hiya, Jack."

"Go in there and get your papers from Mr. Maibach; we'll wait for you."

* * *

Bobby entered the small circulation office through the narrow doors.

Cecil Maibach was a good man, but all business. He wore a tailored suit with wire-rimmed glasses perfectly poised on the bridge of his nose. He was impeccably dressed without a hint of ink or speck of dust on him.

"First day?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Name?"

"Bob... er, Robert Schilling."

"Ah, Arthur's boy. Glad to know you. I'm sorry about your father. I knew him well; we grew up together." He paused, looked down, pressed his lips together then looked back at Bobby. "I'm Mr. Maibach, the Superintendent. Check in here in the afternoons at 2 o'clock, five cents per paper. From here on out you'll report to the Circulation manager, Mr. Charles Richardson. Here's the subscription list. Fold them outside. You can start by St. John's."

Without skipping a beat, he called out to Jack.

"Jack, would you take him with you and show him the ropes?"

Mr. Maibach scribbled something down in a book with one hand, the other reaching for a stack of papers. He handed Jack a canvas sling and the still warm newspapers. Bobby looked down at the paper and read the words, "Orange Daily News" followed by "Harvest Festival Opens. Crown Queen Tonight. Big Parade Other Events on Tomorrow."

The Harvest Festival and Parade were a big deal for the city of Orange. The Marine Corps band was coming in from El Toro plus a load of classic cars topped with pageant girls and other local stars.

He took the stack of papers outside to the alley where others were gathered. Jack grabbed the stack in Bobby's hands and set them on the wood shelf outside.

"This is how ya fold 'em. Then put 'em in your sling like this," Jack demonstrated.

Bobby set to work as his friends chatted away about the Festival.

"Are you guys going to the Parade tomorrow? My mom said Johnny Mack Brown is gonna be the Grand Marshall."

Bobby's ears perked up.

Johnny Mack Brown the western star was going to be there. Bobby loved western films.

"Gee," Bobby sighed.

Stumbling upon a movie star from time to time wasn't unusual for the locals on account of the freeways leading them right into town. They would always get lost on their way to somewhere else and need directions. Johnny liked to tell the story of that one time Vincent Price got lost near the City Park and gave him a lift home in his black Cadillac.

"Gimme page 4. I wanna read the funnies," Dave interjected.

The usual strips featuring the likes of Gordo, Little Mary Mixup and Curly Kayoe decorated the right side of the page along with the crossword puzzle of the day.

"Are you goin' to the watch the game tonight? Lionettes versus Buena Park," Jack said.

"Nah. I was thinking of heading to the theatre," said Johnny.

"What's playing?"

Dave thumbed through the paper and read aloud, "*Singapore* with Ava Gardner and *Vigilantes Return*."

"Oh boy, that Ava Gardner is somethin' else," Johnny said dreamily.

Bobby was more excited about the western than the sappy Gardner flick. Sometimes he would go out behind Gammie's house with a peashooter, line up empty cereal boxes and pretend he was Nick Grindell. The box of Corn-Soya was Tim Barrett from the *Western Code*.

You came here looking for trouble, didn't you? Bobby would whisper Barrett's lines to himself.

Well, I'm here and I'm looking at you if that's what you mean.

I'm getting tired of your meddling. This town ain't big enough for the both of us!

And then he'd start shooting.

* * *

Mr. Maibach broke into Bobby's daydream and the boys' conversation, shouting, "Get on your way!"

Without a word the kids gathered their things and shook out of there. There were tall, skinny windows along the remainder of the alley and Bobby could see inside.

The front office was buzzing with people and work. Ms. Amy Palmiter, the Woman's Editor was sitting at her desk chatting away on the phone between sips of coffee with her typewriter in front of her. There were a few journalists coming and going with papers in hand. Bobby also saw people from the neighborhood—some he knew, some he didn't—entering the building to place ads for work needed, sell their old clunkers in the Classified section or maybe to announce so-and-so's engagement to what's his name.

Bobby rounded the corner and stood in front of the single story building. Surveying the setting of his first occupation, the building was covered in brick-like stucco. The windows on either side of the front doors were separated by four pillars that led to three little sand colored Mediterraneanesque points at the top. The façade had been added to the bare brick building in the 30s. Bobby thought it looked a little out of place.

Cutting off the other end of the building was a real estate office and Spick 'n' Span Cleaners. On his left, the Plaza was alive with cars and people anticipating the Parade the next day. He felt like he was seeing the Plaza in a new light, and for the first time he was part of the hustle and bustle.

THUD!

Bobby crashed into a tall man of about 60 dressed in a tan suit and wearing thin-rimmed glasses. The man's brown hair was perfectly parted and combed to the side. He was standing with two other men. One he recognized as Mr. Ray Arguello, who stood with his arms crossed, in mid-sentence. Mr. Arguello was the Managing Editor and wrote the *Around the Towne* column that covered all sorts of local news and happenings. The other man was Ranald Fairbairn, the Editor-Publisher of the newspaper. Mr. Fairbairn was a portly man with a sharp nose and looked like he spent a lot of time in the sun. Bobby had seen Mr. Fairbairn play on the Orange baseball team.

The tall man in the tan suit chuckled a little.

"Whoa!"

"Excuse me, Sir," Bobby said sheepishly.

"That's alright, son. You just keep your eyes ahead of you from here on or those papers won't get to where they need to go."

"Yes, Sir."

The boys scurried away, but only got a few feet before Jack poked him in the ribs.

"Do you know who that was?" Jack hissed.

"Er..."

"That was Justus Craemer. He practically owns the paper!"

Bobby looked back even more embarrassed.

* * *

The two boys started south on Glassell and turned on Almond Avenue toward St. John's Lutheran Church. Johnny and Dave's routes were to the north so they parted ways, agreeing to meet back at the paper once they were done.

They tossed the folded newspapers on the porches of Victorian and Craftsman homes with big yards and trees all around. House after house they circled around the streets as far as south Cambridge Street and East Palmyra Avenue. They worked their way back toward the Plaza.

Jack approached a three-story house painted white with pink trim. After a few minutes he returned with a dime in his hand.

"Pennies from heaven," Jack said with a mature chuckle as he held up the dime then quickly stuffed it into the pocket of his blue jeans.

"You got a tip? Aww. I want to take the next."

The boys continued, crossing Center Street. They heard a portable radio playing and came upon a yellow and white Craftsman house—it was Johnny's house. Three girls about 13 years old—including Johnny's sister Jane—were spending the afternoon in the sun. One of Jane's friends was thumbing through a magazine while laying on the porch step.

Bobby couldn't stop staring as he held their newspaper in his hand. He saw Jane all the time, but she looked different today out there on the porch. She looked older.

Jane's shiny ringlets bounced perfectly in place and her cotton summer dress swayed back and forth to "Near You" by The Andrews Sisters. Finally the girls became aware of Jack and Bobby's presence. The music seemed to fade into the background.

"Hi, Bobby."

"Hi, Jane."

There was an awkward pause. He handed her the newspaper.

"Uhh... here."

"Thanks. Hey, you goin' to the Parade Saturday?"

"Yeah."

"Well, we're all gonna meet at Watson's at 1:30 p.m. if you want to join us."

"Uhh... yeah. Yeah, that sounds good."

Jack nudged Bobby in the ribs.

"See ya tomorrow," Bobby ventured and waved his hand limply.

"See ya."

Jack whispered, "Drooling?"

Bobby snorted, "No!"

"C'mon, we have to get back soon."

They hurried back to News Alley to turn their money and extra papers in to Mr. Maibach.

As they walked down the alley they caught a glimpse of Johnny rummaging through the bin outside McInnes Printing with Dave and Bobby's brother Joey standing by. He had a little bag full of lead from the linotype machine.

Dave spoke up.

"You guys ready to go?"

"What are you doing, Johnny?" Jack asked.

"So Dad can make sinkers. We're going to Irvine Lake next week." He grabbed one last piece and said, "Okay, I'm ready; let's go!"

They all hurried over to the theatre, passing Dave their nickels.

"You know the drill, boys," Dave said.

And they made their way to the back door.

* * *

The next morning Bobby practically leapt out of bed with excitement.

I'm gonna see Johnny Mack Brown! Maybe he'll give me his autograph.

There was something else about today he was excited about, but couldn't pin it down.

That's right; I'm meeting Jane at Watson's.

It shouldn't have been a big deal, but when he saw her yesterday he'd felt differently about her than he had before. She wasn't just Johnny's sister anymore. She was *Jane*.

Bobby got himself ready, did a few chores and headed to Gammie and Grandy's for lunch.

Mom took Tom and Joey to participate in the other festivities—the swimming and diving contests and the horse competition. He was supposed to meet up with them at 5 o'clock for the outdoor barbeque at the city park.

After lunch Bobby headed over to Watson's.

Jane was standing at the counter in a pink dress with a matching bow in her hair. When she saw him walk in she waved him over and introduced him to the same girls who were on the porch yesterday. Angie and Maria. They must have been new to town because Bobby had never seen them before.

"Angie and Maria live in Fullerton and are out here for the Parade."

His brother Art walked in from the back, his black hair slicked and shiny.

"Hi Jane," he said with a smirk.

"Hi Art," she said softly, her eyes dropping to the ground.

"Hey Bob, what're you doin' here? Shouldn't you be somewhere with your slingshot?" Art snickered.

"Jane asked me to come. We're going to the Parade together."

"Oh? You got a little crush there, Bob?" He smacked his gum.

Bobby's heart started pounding. His face felt hot and red. His fists clenched. Jane's face turned red too. Angie and Maria giggled quietly into their sodas.

"Don't you have work to do, Art?" Bobby said tightly.

Art got the point and backed down, unphased.

Jane turned to Bobby, "The Parade won't be coming through the Plaza for a little while. Do you wanna go for a walk?"

It was music to his ears. He wanted to get out of there—away from the music, away from Angie and Maria and away from Art.

"Sure."

They headed down Chapman Avenue to the railroad tracks, talking the whole way. He told her about Art, about his new job, about baseball, about his favorite western movies. Before they knew it almost an hour had passed.

The two ducked into a small orange grove behind someone's house.

"When my dad was around, he would take trips to Mexico and bring back firecrackers. Before Tom was born he would take me and Art and Joey into the groves and stuff them into old oranges that had fallen on the ground. Then he'd light them and throw them into the air."

Bobby picked up an orange and threw it as high as he could, mimicking the explosion.

"Pcksh!"

He fell silent. He missed his dad and it was obvious. It was like every good memory was tied to the fact that his father was gone—forever.

Somehow Jane understood. She grabbed Bobby's hand.

"I remember when we all went to Doheny together. Your dad taught me how to swim. It's sad that he's gone. I'm sorry, Bobby."

Bobby was quiet for a moment before he turned to her. He didn't know how it happened, but it happened fast.

For just a moment, his lips met hers.

She looked a little startled.

"Uhh... Sorry."

She nervously ran her fingers through her curls.

"Um. We'd better get back."

"Yeah."

You are an idiot! Why would you do that? She'll never talk to you again!

The walk back was quiet.

They headed back down Olive Street and through an alley. They cut past the people in front of the Orange Daily News building. They had reached the Plaza just in time for the Parade. The streets were lined with people and the beauty pageant girls in fancy cars and floats passed. Next up was Johnny Mack Brown. Bobby was excited to see him, but his heart still pounded from what had happened just a few blocks away.

Standing side by side in the crowd, surrounded by his friends, Jane reached down and grabbed his hand. They looked at each other and smiled and then started laughing. Johnny Mack Brown waved in the direction of the News building and Jane and Bobby waved back.

* * *

"Miss, I'm sorry, we're going to be closing in five minutes."

I looked up from the page to see the Starbucks baristas in their green aprons mopping the floor, the one who took my order wiping chairs off before placing them upside down on the tables.

It was dark and the Plaza was bathed in incandescent light.

I retired my pen, closed my Composition book and gathered my papers, among them copies of photos from the Harvest Festival Parade and the people who lived and worked here all those years ago.

I wonder what year I'll travel to next time I visit the Plaza. I took the last swig of my now cold cup of coffee and headed for the door.

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Amber Montgomery is a freelance journalist living in Orange County. She graduated

Magna Cum Laude from California State University, Fullerton with a degree in Communications and an emphasis in Journalism. Amber spends her free time in the kitchen or garden and frequents the local mountains to spend time in nature. Although her foundation is in nonfiction, she always keeps a few fiction pieces in the works.

Float for queen and her court in the Orange Harvest Festival Parade, Orange, California, 1947. The queen, Carrel Benson, is sitting at the back of the float with a radiating orange section behind her and two large artificial oranges on each side. In front of her are Joyce Steele on the left, Esther Burrell on the right, and two unidentified young girls between them. Barbara Anderson is in a dark dress in the center, and left to right at the front are Janet Curl and Barbara Danker. The float is pulled by a pickup truck from Mansur Motors and the view is north with Plaza Park behind them, on their left side. The float has a sign on the CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, ORANGE HARVEST FESTIVAL. Courtesy of the Local History Collection, Orange Public Library, Orange, CA. Copy and Reuse Restrictions Apply.