

Thanks for the memories, Chip

By Ed Breen

Sometimes, maybe most in times such as we now share, albeit at a distance, it is useful to take a backward glance over the shoulder at where we have been all these years.

More true, probably, for those of us who've done some living, rather than for the youngsters. They will get their turn, but they must wait, as Rod McKuen wrote so beautifully, until they have . . .

"Learned of love and ABCs

Skinned our hearts and skinned our knees"

And a resident of the neighborhood, gone on to other things now for these 50 years past, took me to that the other day when he rummaged through memory for images — some snapshots; others blurry, grainy movie clips in the mind — back in the late '60s and early '70s when Chip and Kevin and Mouse and our own kids were skinning their hearts and knees in the streets and alleys and backyards of west central Marion, that rectangular chunk of old Marion between Nebraska Street

and Western Avenue and from Spencer Avenue south to Third Street, just to the steps of Horace Mann and Martin Boots schools, which stood side by side at the top of the hill.

Both are gone now, just as are the youngsters who are now in late middle age.

We called him Chip. His name was Charles, Charles Price and his formative years were spent looking out on to Nelson Street in the 800 or 900 block.

He was blustery, bombastic, lovable like a large bear, given to settling disputes, which were frequent, with his . . . well, I don't want to say fists. Let's just say upper body strength. His was a hard-scrabble life and he traded up when he joined the United States Navy after graduation in the early '80s and saw much of the world. Home port was San Diego.

But I've told you enough. Let him tell his story. He lives out West now; has for many years, and this showed up on his Facebook page not long ago.

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"Good Times . . ." he called it.

"I grew up in Marion, Indiana. When I was a child, our area code was 317. Most of my clothes came from Sears, JC Penney, and Hand-Me-Downs.

"If you had a pool you were king of the block; we didn't have a swimming pool, we had sprinkler. Eating out at a restaurant was a huge deal that only happened for very special occasions.

"Fast food was a bologna, tuna, grilled cheese or a PB&J sandwich to take outside in the yard. Eating ice cream from the ice cream truck was a treat on a hot day.

"You took your school clothes off as soon as you got home and put on your play clothes. We had to do our homework before being allowed outside to play. We ate dinner at the table with our family! We went to school every day. There was no taking or picking you up in the car;

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you walked, took the bus or rode your bike.

"Our phone hung on the wall in the kitchen and had a long cord, there were no private conversations or cell phones!

"We played Mother May I, Red Light Green Light, Simon Says, Red Rover, Hide and Seek, Truth or Dare, Tetherball, Baseball, 4 square, Kick Ball, Dodge Ball, GI Joe's, and rode bikes.

"We ate what mom made for dinner or we ate nothing at all! There was

no bottled water; we drank from the tap or the water hose, which was warm. We watched cartoons on Saturday mornings, Disney on Sunday night, and rode our bikes for hours and ran around in the streets. We weren't afraid of anything. If someone had a fight, that's what it was and we were friends again later, if not sooner.

He goes on, but you get the point. And some of the others from that same neighborhood, just down the street from us, chimed in with more.

Football in the backyard and on another night that football field made an excellent ground for a campout, but close enough to home that all was okay if the rain came.

And that leads us back to Rod McKuen just one more time:

"We had joy, we had fun

We had seasons in the sun

But the wine and the song

Like the seasons have all gone. . . ."

Chip, thanks for the reminder, and come home and visit when you can.

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