

## Street Walking

*By Sheila Johnson*

The summer of 1975 found us walking down the streets of Denver looking for a small nightclub, whose name I have forgotten. We were new to Colorado and even newer to the downtown area as we had spent our first two years in Aurora parenting an eighteen month old and a newborn. New acquaintances from his work place told my husband we just had to find this club, as this artist with a phenomenal voice, by the name of Hazel Miller, was giving her last performance for the summer season. My mom was in town, so we had babysitting (which was a rare occasion being the helicopter mom that I am), so we were excited!

As we walked the streets of Denver trying to find the “hole in the wall” club, we were also looking for the horses and western wear that the rumor mill had spilled about the Rocky Mountain town of cowboys and horse driven buggies. To our delight, none were found. The streets were fairly empty and pretty dark. Did we have the correct hand-written directions? (There were no cell phones, Google maps, or talking Siri voices). We asked a few passers-by, and most of them assured us that we were headed in the right direction. My husband and I also noticed how friendly the people were, how clean the alleys were, and how good the aroma smelled that spewed from the nearby restaurants.

Destination found! Boy, were we glad to finally arrive for some good ole toe-tapping, hand-clapping, soul-rapping jazz. And the warnings were true. Hazel Miller rocked the smoke filled, dimly lit storeroom-sized club. We were thrilled! We had a few drinks, talked to a few people, and were on our way home after a wonderful evening.

Walking to our car, we forgot where we were parked. The alley seemed so wide, the streets seemed fairly empty, there were a few homeless people taking up camp in the parking lots, and there was a calm about this city that I’m afraid will never return. After several walks around the streets of Champa, Stout, and California, we spotted our 1968 LeMans and headed home. All was well.

As a new employee of Mountain Bell, I loved to use my lunch hour walking from Champa Street to Joslins. What a treat to window shop, and plan for maybe a new scarf for the winter! I could not afford much more, but it was nice to daydream. The lunch hour crowd had several food carts to choose from: hot dogs, hoagies, hamburgers, soup bowls, and rice bowls—who needed a fancy restaurant? Those were reserved for the evening theatre-goers and ‘after-the-game’ fans.

Fast forward to 2018—Joslins and other stores have been replaced by a downtown mall. The Sixteenth Street Mall has a train that actually moves north and south. Asking for directions can be risky. Vendors pay high street taxes for their carts. If you ask a Millennial, “Where’s the old Mountain Bell building?” they might say, “It might be in LoDo or near Coors Field.”

The streets of Denver have changed—not always so friendly, a mixed crowd of six figure earners and homeless folk, unwed and unfed mothers and fathers, young in age and young at heart, old street and old war veterans, sweet smells of food carts and pot, and an ever-growing

population of teens looking for a home.

Now and then, the theatre and the arts entice me to walk the streets of downtown Denver. The streets of Denver have changed.