



## **ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK MEMORIES OF NORTH PARK**

**By Robert Hoy  
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I now reside in Anaheim, California since 1983. I was born in North Park at Mercy Hospital in 1944. We lived at 3952 Illinois Street until about 1963. My Grandfather Victor Whitaker, Sr. had been a Captain in the U.S. Army. After retiring he worked as a security guard at First National Bank at 30th & University. My Grandmother Cora Whitaker was very active in a senior citizen group at the North Park Baptist Church called the "Goldenairs." My mother Faye Hoy worked as Office Manager at Hudson City Motors—later changed to Howard Taylor Dodge—located at Colombia & B in Downtown San Diego. My Grandmother was friends with the mother of famous Boston Red Socks player Ted Williams who lived in North Park. My best friend as a kid was Greg Nettles who later became a star player with the New York Yankees.

I attended Jefferson Elementary School. I vividly remember the Palisades Gardens Skating Rink on University Ave. Large numbers of Navy men in their white outfits would visit there on weekends. I often visited the North Park Theater. Almost every Saturday as a child I went to the old Ramona Theater. Admission for kids was only 15 cents. I remember Stanley Andrew Sporting Goods just around the corner from our house, and Whitney's Appliance Store on Illinois & University. The old Thrifty Drug Store was neat. We shopped at the Mayfair Market on 30th street. Across from Mayfair was my favorite, North Park Hobby Shop. I remember the very nice JJ Jessop & Sons Jewelry Store on University & 30th corner. I still have a watch purchased there in 1967. I attended church at North Park Baptist and also Vacation Bible School during the summers. I shopped at Pep Boys on University some 50 years ago. My Uncle Victor Whitaker, Jr. was City Editor at the San Diego Union Newspaper. He worked there for many years and his last position was Director of Education. I delivered the San Diego Independent newspaper for several years. Doing this job I walked the streets of North Park delivering 350 newspapers every Thursday and Sunday. We lived just behind the old Dixie Lumber Company. They had a large furnace that was used to burn scraps. I would make many trips to pick up small wood piece scraps for our fireplace. My Grandfather would pay me 1/2 cent per trip so 50 trips got be a quarter. Then I could travel to the North Park Hobby Shop and purchase 8 used comic books at 3 cents each. After reading these they could be exchanged 2 for 1 on others.

North Park was a great place to grow up in the 1940s–50s–60s. It was clean–safe–friendly. Business were run by their owners and service was great. Bus travel was plentiful and cheap. I think that I could ride all the way downtown for 10 to 15 cents. The San Diego Zoo was free admission to kids under 16 years. This was a great and educational place to visit during summer vacation from school. In the 1960s my mother and I moved to East San Diego on Winona Ave. I would still walk to my grandmother's home on Illinois Street often. It was probably 6 miles or so, but I could cover the distance quickly. I walked there during daylight and evening hours and always felt safe. There were few people out walking or driving in the evenings back then. Learners, Woolworth, etc.; so many great old stores were operating. I had another great friend who lived at 30th and Upas and walked there often.

During the early 1950s I remember the Fuller Brush Man visiting North Park every couple of months. His huge suitcase contained so many goodies valued by the local housewives. He would return to deliver the products in a month or so. There were also door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesmen. A man with a cute little pony would come through North Park 2-3 times yearly. You could have a picture taken of your child sitting on the pony while wearing a cowboy suit and hat. Somewhere around here I have such a picture of me taken around 1952.



Robert Hoy's "Pony Picture"

One of North Park's most famous former residents would have to be the baseball player Ted Williams. I believe that some of his lifetime hitting scores are still records today. This is unbelievable considering that he took a couple of years off from the game to join the U.S. Military during WWII. My grandmother knew his mother and said that they were a very nice family. Now I just remembered the annual Toyland Parade down University Avenue. Our family always arrived very early to lay a blanket and claim a curbside seat. It was always a great event. I remember the popular Monte Montana, a cowboy star who was always part of the parade. We always watched from Illinois & University corner. I also remember the Old Fire Station with its tall hose tower.

Wow! When you are now 66 years old and remembering the "Early Days" living in North Park the memories just keep coming. I have had a long, happy, successful life and owe much to the great start as a child born, growing up, and living in North Park in San Diego.

It is great that North Park has a historical association to preserve the long history of this fine place. My memories of North Park are still vivid even though they now go back almost 60 years. Keep up your fine work.



3952 Illinois today



The one across the street is very nice and almost identical to what 3952 looked like "Back in the Day." Funny thing is that as a kid I used to mow the lawn at that house. The owner was Mrs. Heimbeck and she lived there with her daughter. I remember this well as I had hay fever and every time that I mowed her lawn I sneezed for the next two days.

#### Postscript on the Water Tower

When first traveling down El Cajon Blvd. and I saw the tower, I said, "Boy that thing needs painting!" We took another drive by the old water tower as well as viewing it from all directions. It is certainly a visible landmark from University Ave to El Cajon Blvd. and everywhere in between.

Driving home I looked at the water tower in Santa Ana which is located next to the freeway. This one really stands out with lighting and a white paint job and logo.

There are a lot of "Purists" on restoring old things whether they be cars or structures. I am not one and prefer to add modern touches to accent and give a touch of present day to things. Giving the matter further thought a "Corporate Sponsor" —or two or three—would give a great boost of reality to a restoration project. Of course, they would want something in return for their expenses whatever that might be?

Some initial "Wild Ideas:"

- Restore to original look with just a paint job
- Original look with lighting to be a 24-hour daily landmark
- Add a pole & lighted American Flag to the top
- Add small colored plastic flags to the poles (lightning arrestors?) on top
- Brighten it up like green top & supports - white tank body - green NORTH PARK lettering facing east & west.
- Go with Red-White-Blue theme & flag to celebrate San Diego's history in the War effort and its sacrifices during this time.

Some of my thoughts may be "Too Radical" for conservative residents of the area? Somewhere between "Nothing" and my "Boldest Ideas" might be a meeting place for interest in such a project.

The North Park Sign is certainly the "Centerpiece" of the downtown area and its history. As nice as it is, the sign is not as dramatic and easily viewed throughout the community as the Water Tower. A new upgraded and well lit Water Tower would be the most dramatic - visible - bold - statement of North Park and its long history to the surrounding communities. It could become a Kodak Moment photo opportunity for locals as well as visitors. It would be visible for miles at night and become a road-map to find North Park from any direction.

Living in the Midwest for several years, I viewed that every town had a Water Tower which somewhat reflected the "Personality" of the community. Some were white, others red or striped or had logos, etc. Almost all reflect the name of the town on the tower. Water Towers are important to the history of communities as well as permanent landmarks and locators.

I researched pictures of Water Towers all over the USA. There are hundreds of these "Community Landmarks" all over the country. Potential corporate sponsors might get a "Sponsored by Sign" at the base of the tower as well as in the Recreation Center. If there is any interest and people think practical I would be glad to assist in any way possible. A letter on Historical Society letterhead could be sent to major companies doing business in North Park. They would have the opportunity to be involved in important city history as well as receiving positive publicity and advertising throughout the area. They could be involved in the greatest 24/7 landmark in central San Diego.

In the late 70's I was involved in Corporate Sponsorships at Magic Mountain Amusement Park in Valencia, CA, and in the late 80's at Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park, CA. It was amazing how many companies were willing to sponsor various rides and attractions. As I recall Wells Fargo Bank was the sponsor of the Magic Mountain Sky Tower and paid us \$75,000 yearly in 1977. Anything can be possible if people want something to happen.