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New Bern in the hushed darkness just before dawn is a placid sight to behold. There's a gentleness and serenity about the old town at this so-called ungodly hour that neither the morning sun nor the moon and stars at eventide can ever duplicate.

Small wonder that some of us like to rise early—not because work demands it but for the sheer joy of being up and about in time to greet the oncoming day. Call us queer ducks for not slumbering two or three extra hours while we've got the chance, but don't make us stay in bed.

Unless you're a confirmed dawn buster, you simply have no idea of how fresh and wonderful air can be. And in a world where noise and confusion usually reign, it's downright uplifting to the soul to walk along deserted streets where you and God can have a little talk without outside interruption.

A man can really take inventory of himself when, in the midst of familiar surroundings, he comes face to face with solitude. Nothing short of snow's concealing cloak transforms ugliness into beauty like the mist of pre-dawn darkness. Buildings, streets, traffic lights blinking their amber warning—they all seem enmeshed in a web of magic.

Memories stir early too. No matter how soon you take to the streets, you'll discover that your recollections are out there already, waiting to be gathered. One by one you pluck them from memory's garden, as you pass this house and that where unforgettable incidents unfolded in the days of your childhood and adolescence.

This is the street where you once whooped and hollered on Halloween and the Fourth of July. And in this yard, right over there, you and the other kids in the neighborhood built a ramshackle clubhouse out of stray boards that were held together precariously by straightened-out, second-hand nails.

Nobody except members of the gang knew the secret motto, and all sorts of terrible things were threatened if you told a single soul. It was a rigid rule that no girl could pass through the portals, not even the ones who were tomboys and could beat the heck out of you shooting marbles.

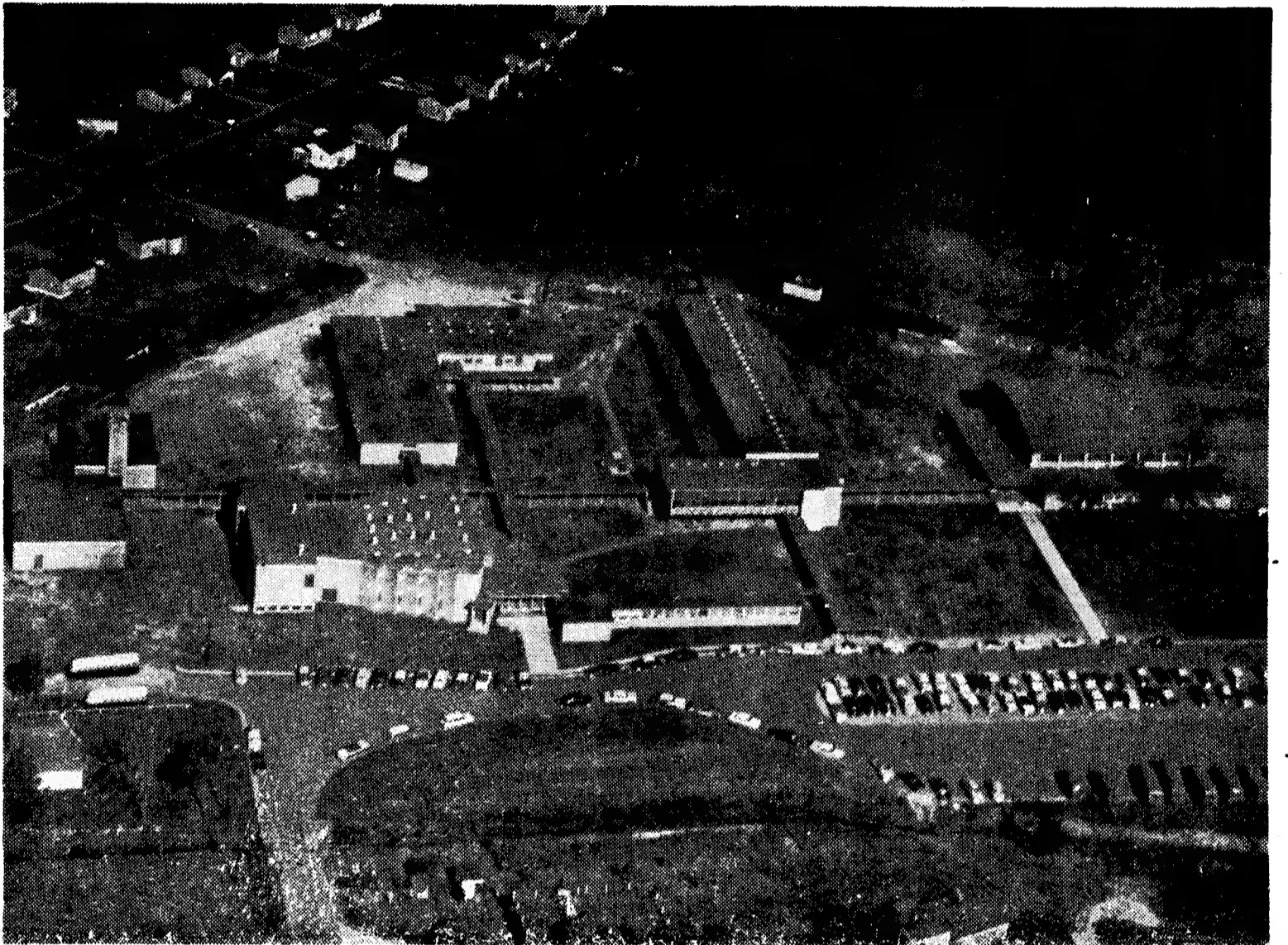
Yes, every house is a memory unto itself. You picture the birthday parties, and the dime presents you exchanged for a dish of ice cream and a slice of cake. You remember the pecans you swiped from somebody's backyard, and the fussy lady who fumed when you accidentally knocked a baseball over her fence and into her flowers.

You aren't exactly by yourself in the early morning hours. The man who drives the street sweeper is going about his chores—tidying up the downtown section. The bread trucks are making their first calls, too, at the restaurants, and the milk truck has started its rounds while the city dozes.

If you get out early enough, you'll see waitresses scurrying to work in their freshly laundered white attire. You recognize Buster Turley's station wagon, hauling batches of the Raleigh News and Observer to the various eateries so that coffee drinkers can read of murder and rape, and scan the sports pages, while they're warming their innards with that first cup of java.

Ben Jones and W. B. Rouse show up right on schedule at their favorite table, to hurl insults at each other. Ben tears the Republican party to shreds, while Rouse denounces the Democrats with undiminished vigor.

Captain Dick Honrine checks into the cafe too, as does Harold Maxwell, who does several hours work at his place of business before the average New Bernian stirs



AS A BIRD SEES IT—There's just one way to get a complete glimpse of New Bern High school at a single glance. You've got to take to the air in a plane, and that's what was done in this case. What makes the photo quite unusual

is the fact that it was snapped by the High school principal himself, Dr. Richard Spear, who is handy with a plane as well as a camera.

That Jolly Old Gentleman Is Coming to New Bern Tonight

Familiarity breeds contempt, they say, but for a guy who comes to town every year this fellow Santa Claus is certainly getting a lot of attention.

You would think it was his very first visit, the way his scheduled arrival tonight has caught the fancy of folks hereabouts. In fact, if Rudolph—back home at the North Pole with the other reindeer—didn't love his master so much, his red nose would turn green with envy.

No one else who ever traversed our streets — not even George Washington, Harry Truman or Babe Ruth—was fortunate enough to be accorded the rousing welcome that is reserved for the patron saint of childhood. It's a thing to behold, thrill to and remember.

There's no getting around it, the main attraction for the small fry who will be lined along the curbs in our downtown section is going to be Santa. We're glad it's that way.

The inflated balloons have appeal, of course, depicting as they will "The Night Before Christmas," but Saint Nick himself won't be seriously challenged for the lime-

beneath the covers.

Hunters and fishermen get off to an early start, but you can usually tell by the look on their faces that they don't care overly much for this early rising routine. Only rarely do they join in the bantering. Instead, they stare, glumly at a plate of hot cakes.

This is New Bern in the darkness before dawn,

light.

Most adults, including those who feel that religion isn't emphasized enough in our celebration of Christmas, aren't overly critical of this attitude on the part of the children. It is entirely possible that the Santa Claus myth is a God-intended thing. Certainly no one knows better than the Good Lord what is dear to the heart of childhood, how it came about, and how it has survived through the centuries.

If the truth were known, parents witnessing tonight's parade with their excited offspring will get as big a kick as any tot. Whether it's good, bad or mediocre, there's something about a welcoming parade for Saint Nick that makes it extra special.

You sense it in the air of tense expectancy, and you see it in the animated expressions of kids—rich and poor, white and colored. Some of these kids will get a lot—far too many a little, on Christmas eve.

But all of them have a deep and abiding faith.

No one in his right mind should ever grow too old to share in that faith. To share a belief in the importance of stockings hung by an open fireplace, and the incredible speed of eight tiny reindeer, capable of racing all over the world in a single night with a sleigh full of toys and a joy gift bringer manning the reins.

Santa himself, older than the memory of man, is a classic example of eternal youth. He needs no tonic, no tranquilizers and has nary an ulcer to contend with. This despite the most gigantic responsibility imaginable.

Incidentally, we know we're voicing the overwhelming sentiment here when we hail the decision to wait until after the Thanksgiving holidays to hold New Bern's Christmas parade. Public opinion reacts unfavorably against anything that smacks of "rushing" the Christmas season, and putting any portion of our Yuletide on the calendar before the Thanksgiving weekend has come and gone is an insult to everyone's intelligence, and certainly in bad taste.

Frankly, many citizens are keeping their fingers crossed about the use of inflated balloons in this year's parade. Their memories aren't too short to remember the last such parade, when dirt-covered, worn-out figures were hauled along in a decidedly bedraggled procession.

Local merchants, acting in good faith, had a fast one pulled on them
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SANTA'S ON HIS WAY!

You'll See Him In Tonight's Christmas Parade