Yes, Syracuse has changed.
But then, we all have.

im from here.

My mother used to make me go grocery shopping with her, at Loblaw's on East Adams Street. Years later a guy I knew at SU told me he thought Adams was the city's main drag. He didn't get out much. What it was—and still is—is the main drag, town to gown. These days, town knows it as a) the shortest route to the hospital emergency rooms, or b) the shortest way to the Dome, which is what we call our sports stadium.

You might remember the modest bowl, Archbold Stadium.

Adams, in those days, ran two ways, as God meant it to run, and delivered University students to the picture shows, the department stores, the central post office, train station, and traffic court, a landmark on Clinton Square that belongs in many personal histories of short lives in Syracuse.

While my mother shopped for pork chops, I'd often sit in the car and look up the hill to the east and stare at the University. It seemed close—it was—but faraway. Big, Lofty, Aloft.

I wasn't thinking about being a student at SU just then. I wanted to be a druggist.

But I flunked chemistry and met Ruth Markley, an English teacher who started a journalism club in my high school, and Wes Clark, a journalism dean who moved into Marcellus, my hometown. Miss Markley and Wes Clark straightened my course and pointed me toward The Hill, as we used to call this place of higher education.

Just about the first building on campus I put my foot into as a student was the Hellbox, a dirty, disheveled prefab right behind the Castle, the school of journalism in the old Yates mansion. I couldn't wait to get in there and pour myself into a typewriter.

The Hellbox and the Castle got to be fixtures in my life as a member of the SU community. They're gone, of course. We're told the modern replacements are better. That's not something I'll argue. They are better, but their memories belong to somebody else.

by Dick Case
anybody out

remember the tiny "Student Union" of the fifties on South Crouse? The Corner Store? The first Orange Café? (Quick, who was Esther?) The Coke and Caper Club? Boar's Head Theater in Machinery Hall?

The Dingleman?

Change is forward motion, with relics and memories left behind. Syracuse, town and gown, progressed by moving the pieces around, substituting old with new, tearing down, putting up.

Adams became a one-way artery grafted onto the town's brain, University Hill. Since the sixties it has been passed over by an interstate highway, numbered 81, which cinches the city with a waistbelt of concrete and asphalt.

I-81 is probably the major physical change of our town in the last 50 years. It's a mixed blessing, ugly but convenient for moving us out of Syracuse, which is another change; we're more apt to commute than live in town.

The city population for this old canal port peaked at 220,000 in 1950. We're at 163,000 now and moving backwards, little by little, while the metro area grows, little by little.

We have a community plaza downtown reaching north from Adams. It's home to an art museum, the jail, police station, courthouse, county offices, and our latest toy, a building called OnCenter.

OnCenter, like the Dome, was built to draw crowds. It's a place for conventions, auto shows, and large wedding receptions. Onnie has more parking than Disney World and connects underground to a landmark that's been around a while, the War Memorial.

You might remember this concrete Quonset as the hall where the Syracuse Nats played basketball and Elvis was booked to sing just before he died. Lincoln Auditorium, where we went to hear the Boston Pops and Spike Jones, is embalmed in a high school remodeled into an office building downtown.

Old Loew's State movie house on Salina Street became the Landmark, a community arts center. The Astor, where the drama department did its musicals in the fifties, was razed. The Regent got swallowed into the new Archbold (the old oil baron's millions now give us drama instead of sports), home to Syracuse Stage.

It's possible to take in a play in the Regent's former hulk, then walk across Irving Avenue—yes, Meltzer's and Sid's are AWOL—and have a beer or a plate of salad and quiche at Phoebe's Garden Café.

Phoebe Cohen is tucked away out there in time. We remember the first Phoebe's at the south end of the modern joint that carries her name but not her folkways. Phoebe died awhile back; her last work was making sandwiches for student litigators at the College of Law.

The last time I was in the Garden Café I sat next to a table presided over by a man wearing a sweatshirt reading "My Son's the Orange."

The Orange?

Orange, one of our school colors, has metamorphosed into a creature shaped like a Florida fruit. Our orange had no dad we knew of.

Those of us raised on the Saltine Warrior still can't figure how this came about. The Warrior was an American Indian. He passed the way of Bill Orange.

But then University sports changed.
The old Central High School, which housed Lincoln Auditorium, has been converted into an office building. Note the two-way traffic on Adams Street, "as God meant it to run."

SU students of my era weren’t much for exploring beyond the corporate limits of the University (or Piety) Hill during their four-year leases in Syracuse. I remember a pal from Jersey who went bonkers when he showed him Skaneateles Lake. Instantly, a whole world “out there” was revealed to him.

We’d giggle about the Outing Club meeting Sunday mornings on the library steps. Oakwood Cemetery was a long way. My friends needed maps to get to Tecumseh, which has become a theme bar. The tables finally gave out for all the initials and graffiti carved into them.

The University bought Drumlins and made it a banquet hall for town. Skytop turned into an SU office park and apartment complex with the flat name of South Campus. Every time I go there I think of my classmate Jim Hutton, who got drunk one night and kicked in a wall of one of those miserable Army barracks where we used to hide freshman males.

Jim became an actor. He died, leaving a son, Tim, an actor also. Now that I think about it, a lot of students I knew became actors, or radio announcers. Even Peter Falk, who was in the Maxwell School, became an actor, for heaven’s sake.

Do we have a Nobel laureate among us yet?

I’m sure Jim flipped out because of his lousy, lonely room out there, and because we couldn’t drink on campus. That rule is gone, too.

They’ve messed with the streets around the University over time. The new library took the top piece of Walnut Park but the Frisbees still sail on warm days, when the windows are open, the stereos cranked up. You can’t drive all the way up University Avenue anymore; there’s a set of stairs up Mount Olympus.

We have a monument to the Flight 103 tragedy in the walkway to the Hall of Languages. A rock and plaque mark the spot where WAER used to be. They’ve moved Persephone to hell and around; now she stands in a little outdoor sculpture park next to Sims, which was reborn as the Lowe Art Gallery and the Shaffer Art Building.

Ivan Mestrovic’s studio off Marshall Street? It’s a hotel.

You should know Marshall Street’s pretty much the same short, frantic block it’s always been. The pieces—the stores, the restaurants—may be different, era to era, but it still beats as the oversized heart of our College Town.

When I was in school, this block was as much an institution as the University that suckled it. My friend Lanny O’Kun even wrote a song, "Marshall Street Mope," for a Boar’s Head musical.

Yes, Marshall Street’s a common thread through almost all of our experiences. There aren’t that many threads.

I still have my orange beanie in the attic. I wore it once, I think. Some wise upperclassman clued me in that even though they said you had to wear it, you didn’t really. "How do they know you’re a freshman?" he explained.

He was right, and a kid from here could easily get lost in the traffic between classes. If you commuted, it would be easy to pretend you were still in the 12th grade. I decided I didn’t want to do that after the first—and only—look I had at the commuter’s
lounge. Someone showed that miserable room to us during orientation; I never went back.

Instead, I bought an old car, got a job, jumped into the mainstream of things and pretended I was a real student. After awhile, I was. Later, I rented a room on Clarendon Street, by Thornden Park.

No one seemed to notice I was town. Besides, I knew about the interesting little restaurants, dry cleaners, no-tell motels in the far reaches of the city. I gave good directions to the baseball park, the regional market, and Heid’s of Liverpool, the hot dog joint where they didn’t serve fries.

Thornden remains the best lawn SU has. Her neighbors helped restore the amphitheater, where we used to hold Spring Weekend and young women danced around in filmy, white dresses.

We’re getting a new ballpark for the Chiefs, who belong to the Blue Jays instead of the Yankees. The market’s falling in but may be improved, too; our government managers want to put the train and bus stations out there.

The bus station’s downtown where the train station used to be; the train station for Syracuse is in East Syracuse. There’s a huge mall called Carousel—named for its merry-go-round. Some people think it looks as if a stranded spacecraft, all glassy and blinking, dropped on the shoreline of Onondaga Lake.

Yes, the lake’s polluted still. We’ve got a committee on that challenge, as we did back in 1950. The smell’s not as bad as it used to be, according to some of us.

We are citizens of Syracuse by birth, adoption, and certification. Many are double citizens; we were born here and earned a degree at SU.

I have no science on this but it seems almost every person you meet hereabouts graduated from SU. Truth is, the University touches all of us, one way or another. We become alumni by proximity.

One reason for confusion of identity is that our vision is often clouded by the color orange, which is everywhere we look during basketball season. In those giddy months, when loyalty is sorely tried, we all believe ourselves to be beautiful blonde who used to throw batons in the air at football games. Didn’t she marry the basketball player? What was her name?

Batons? Football? Wait up; I had to refocus. It didn’t take long. Dottie Grove, I said. She married Billy Gabor.

The color orange is known for its saturation powers. Adams Street or Tokyo Heights, it never leaves us.

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