

# Marion Trip: You Can't Go Home Again



By  
**BEN  
MAIDENBURG**

Marion, as you tried and long-true readers will recall, is in the flattest part of Indiana. It once was everything to me. That was when my mom and dad were still alive and when you could get out there by the Erie railroad. Oh! What a wonderful ride that was!

Marion was the "all" when its public square was the evening-and-Saturday strolling place for the farmers in the area — instead of the center of a busy industrial complex.

**WE DROVE** out there the other day to see Mrs. M's mother, recently widowed and who herself has not been in the best of health. Where, for decades, I looked forward to visiting Marion, and hated to leave, this time — the first I can remember — I didn't relish the trip at all, and I could hardly wait to get out of the town.

The trip was a complete nothing, except for seeing a couple or three kinsmen, one of whom helped me get by the dreariness of the visit by flipping the dial of his television set from two baseball games to a football contest. They have the "cable" out there and you can watch from a large selection of sports events with no trouble.

I was invited by another of the kinfolk to a very snazzy Saturday night soiree by a swimming pool. Not having been warned of the shindig in advance, I walked in on a mod-dressed assemblage decked in my traveling-worst, that is, T-shirt and what Mrs. M called "warsh pants."

**I COULDN'T** have cared less, it was so hot and humid. But one or two guests were heard to mumble that the Akron delegate not only had no manners but looked like a bum. A "bum off the street," a lady said.

It was a quite-nice sociable, I suppose, but to me it was just additional evidence that Marion no longer is my old home town.

Used to be we'd sit around and talk for a few moments and then dive into a huge supply of vittles of the kid mom used to make — heavy and not at all fancy, but were they yummy! This party was most moderne. It consisted of an hour and a half of cocktails — we used

to call it boozing — and then some rarified-atmosphere food.

**MY DRINKING** habits amount to perhaps one snort a month. And when one doesn't imbibe, wandering around for an hour and a half and bumping into drinkers is no fun, at least not for me. I suppose I should have taken advantage of the warning that "the party is at 7:30 but we won't eat until 9" by showing up at a quarter to 9.

What nagged me more than the eating-hour (I'm ancient-fashioned in that I like to eat or dine at 6-6:30) was watching kids I had known when they were wetting their diapers strolling about with hard whisky in their paws and asking for refills as if they'd been weaned on the stuff.

I guess the world's gone by me — at least insofar as the sociabilities are concerned. You encounter today's stiffos and they want to know (a) how come you are not drinking; (b) what do you think of Nixon's fight with the press; and (c) when you say you agree the press hasn't been all that reasonable, you get a blow-hard argument.

**ONE OF MY** friends developed into an antagonist when I said to him that while I was not buying Mr. Nixon's current behavior, neither was I sold on the way the press has been handling itself — acting in some instances as if it were Lord Almighty.

He leaped on me, quoting the First Amendment, and when I said something in retort, he climbed higher. All I could do was listen for a couple minutes.

Then I broke in to snap that I had come "here to try to enjoy myself and that if debate is wanted, come to my office." I steamed away, leaving my critic's jaw hanging.

**I RAN INTO** one of my most ancient friends, all be-decked in a red jacket and white shoes and white belt — the complete uniform. I commented on the same, recall-

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ing the old, old days of calm clothes. His wife overheard me and chewed me out a little because she'd had such a difficult time getting her husband to become a "little more dressed up."

I said, finally, that I didn't mind if he liked the clothes — warn't any of my business anyway. The husband cried out that he didn't want any red jacket and gold shirt — he bought them to keep peace in the family. When I best knew Mr. Red Jacket, he was of ordinary circumstances. Now someone said to me, "I wonder how many millions he has . . . ?"

I noted one thing: Mr. Jacket's hair was of obviously a bowl-type cut. You know. It used to be that you'd put a bowl or saucepan on the guy's head and cut the hair around it with home-maintained clippers. I asked how come the high-ears haircut and all heck broke loose again with Mrs. Red Jacket.

Finally, the lady made some sour remark about my own toggery — T-shirt and warsh pants — and we parted.

**YOU SEE** what I mean about Marion today? Long ago, everyone would show up in shirt and pants — not the garish things that spiffed this party — red jackets; striped and checked and polka-dotted trousers. One guy, I recall, had a green jacket, red shirt, white belt, spotted trousers, white slippers with gold buckles and socks that didn't match anything else.

I repeat: perhaps I'm outa style, but I just couldn't put this and the other such outfits in MY Marion and still be happy.

The town is rich. The newspaper, such as it is (you couldn't find out the scores of the ball games played Wednesday in Thursday's editions!!!), reported that there was a large shortage of unskilled help.

**IT IS RICH** in money, in nice homes and in the respect that you can drive in any direction from any point in the city and be out in the "country" in five minutes.

But in memories, well, the town has just plain gone to the dogs as far as I am concerned. I suppose the real

reason is that my mom and dad are gone, and Mrs. M's father — with whom I used to have such rip-roaring debates about politics. And left behind are red jackets and polka-dotted pants and brats who order scotch and water and whom I can recall only in terms of runny noses.

I used to look forward to Marion when my mother was alive because of her skill in cookery and her love for the same.

As I have related so often, the highest honor one could bestow on my mom was to sit at her table and eat (and eat and eat) and the greatest insult would be to say, "Oh, I really am not hungry."

**WE DROVE PAST** the old homestead and I felt like crying — what they had done to it! The place where we were all so happy, and where mom spent so many hours in her kitchen.

As you know, I used to write often about mom, and I still get so many requests that I do so again. It is not that my mother was the most unusual person you've ever met; it was that she was just like 97 pct. of the old-time mothers and old-time days . . .

The days when sanitary facilities, so called, were in the backyard and they were cruel and inhuman treatment in the dead of Winter. The days when our "cellar" (it was no basement then) filled up with water every time it rained, and had to be pumped out by hand . . .

Days when we read by lamplight and later by an electric bulb that "hung like a string," and days when we warmed ourselves and cooked with kindling and coal; and our "jets" were horses and we grew practically everything we ate, except meat.

**BUT THOSE** things were soon forgotten as we started a long and arduous trip back to Akron. If I'd have arrested everyone who was exceeding the speed limit, all but about two of the hundreds of autos we encountered would have been impounded.

And as usual, the speeders in the main drove cars loaded with children, and so many of the drivers buzzed along with one hand on the wheel, and the other cooling off out the window.