

Barnes: Our hometown

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There are many reasons to love living in Prescott.

I love exploring its history: the Sharlot Hall and Phippen Museums, courthouse plaza, Whiskey Row, and Victorian homes are constant reminders of its colorful past.

And, of course, the unique and picturesque Dells. Long may they exist, free and unencumbered by the encroachment of housing or other structural developments.

I love sorting through my memories going back to early 1968 when, on my first day in Prescott, I walked most of Gurley Street duly impressed with the small-town atmosphere and friendliness.

My love for Prescott hasn't diminished, although the community has changed considerably. Population, housing developments, traffic and traffic lights, malls have had a significant impact on life here.

Years ago we used to joke that the town motto might be "Nothing much happens here and nothing much changes here, and that's the way we like it." That's no longer an apt description.

But our community still feels to me like "My Hometown."

And I don't doubt that many newcomers find a community not unlike what Christopher Lasch describes in his book "The True and Only Heaven": "What the outsider finds hardest to penetrate, when it comes to a new place, are not its customs, but its memories, lore, the highly particularized narrative history and hotly contested accounts of that history, the feuds and factions, the smoldering enmities and apparently irrational alliances. These are what unavoidably exclude the outsider and unite the insiders in spite of the bitterest disagreements. It isn't his alien manners but his lack of access to a common fund of memories that marks him as an outsider."

Where Prescott citizens may once have taken pride in standing united against the outside world, the reality is that the world has now successfully and irrevocably invaded and surrounded the community. The old, revered image of "small-town" togetherness is more a memory than a reality.

We need to rid ourselves of that classic American fiction that the small town never changes. Prescott grew up before our eyes and, perhaps, before we were psychologically prepared for it. It may not seem that it had even a protracted adolescence; it just suddenly plunged into maturity.

I prefer not to see Prescott as some lost Eden. I realize we can't recover what our memories tell us were simple and pastoral times. We can feel indebted to the past without obsessing on what we irretrievably lost.

So, we move on, hoping and working for a future that respects the past, and feeling fortunate to be citizens of Prescott.

It's no longer what it was, but it's a great place to live as it is.