

Juanita Aiken and Paula Roebke

Introduction:

The closing of Fains marks the end of an era. I asked Juanita for an interview and we were going to meet at her house (photo enclosed). When the Senior Vice President of Belks, which owns Fains, Mr. Charles Pine, learned Juanita was asking for historic information, he requested that the store manager, Paula Roebke, be present when we discussed the store - which gave an even broader interview as well as relieving Pine's mind.

Side 1:

[8] Juanita was born in West Asheville (she is about 74) but when she was 9 her father died, and her mother with 4 children to raise, had to send her and her sister to an orphanage. There was no Baptist orphanage so they went to the Presbyterian Home for Children. [Black Mountain, NC on a 135-acre farm off of old Highway 70] [Charles R. Long, Wavie Belle Long, Hazel Louise Long Brown]

[33] They were in the 2nd and 3rd grade. The brother (enclosed) was in school and the older sister in Montreat High School. Her mother worked 3 days a week at the cotton mill as a spinner. Juanita and her sister visited and met the people. Her mother was proud to show off her two girls. [Charles R. Long, Jr., Kathryn Lucille Long]

Each new child was guided for the first few days by a child who would be in her group and she remembers playing in the bath tub with toy boats. During nap time on one Sunday she and her sister were crying so were allowed to go outside to play on the nursery-go-round. They gradually got used to being away but never gave up the hope of returning home. Parents were encouraged to have the children remain as they had already suffered one trauma.

[56] At the home the cooks got up at 5 am, rang a bell at 6 and the boys milked the cows. At 6:30 the girls got up, made beds and were lined up for breakfast at 7 - the boys on one side and the girls on the other. There were 9 tables seating 7 people. The Bible was read in turns at breakfast. There was a blessing at lunch and dinner and after dinner, in the big living room, there were prayers, readings, and poems before Study Hall. Basketball was played by both boys and girls but on separate nights.

[88] The boys did all the farm work - raising vegetables - and milking cows for home use. The girls did all the laundry and housework. Duties were assigned and rotated every 6 weeks.

[106] There was no social security for her mother and, with only a 3 day a week job at the mill, she couldn't feed the children. Her uncle, who had no children of his own, brought her mother to the home to visit every other week. She was discouraged from visiting every week as this upset the children. Other children with parents who lived too far away rarely had visits. [Oscar Hensley]

[135] When new girls came to the home, she took care of them. The Presbyterian minister said "there is no sickness like homesickness." [Rev. Joseph Harold Gruver]

[145] The children went to Public School in Swannanoa and on cold days could wait for the bus inside the State Test Farm run by Mr. Clapp. This was an experimental farm. Moore General Hospital is there now. [S.C. Clapp]

[168] The elementary and high schools she attended on Bee Tree Road are still standing. The highway was built after she left.

[193] At Christmas the children had two trees - one in their big living room and one supplied by Mrs. Terry from Black Mountain who also gave presents. Each young child could ask for three presents - roller skates, etc. The older children asked for one - a suitcase for graduation and leaving the home. [Mrs. Lillian E. Terry]

[218] Every year, the first Saturday after July 4th, there is a reunion.

[220] Rev. Gruver, the Presbyterian minister, had a cottage in Montreat, NC, called "Tree Top" and every year 6-7 students with a chaperone would spend a week there. The children also had picnics and marshmallow roasts there. [Rev. Joseph Harold Gruver]

[235] In the summer the boys had swimming 3 times a week and the girls swam the alternate days. There were tennis courts. Alexander coached the boys and girls in basketball and the teams played against Montreat. There was a baseball field and the boys played football. ["Spec" Alexander]

[261] Once a year the members of the Asheville Presbyterian Home Mission visited. The children cooked food for them from their garden and showed them around.

[270] When she graduated there were 6 girls and one boy in her class. There was the same number in her sister's class. Only rarely were there more than 60 students in the house at one time. (see enclosed booklet.)

[286] After graduation she met her husband and worked in a dry cleaners office in West Asheville. When Moore General Hospital opened, Mr. Posey took over the laundry and found work for her mother doing full-time mending. [Elbert H. Posey]

[345] She was married for 9 years, divorced, and did not remarry because she didn't think a substitute father would care for her daughter. Barbara's husband manages the Family Dollar store on Haywood Street - formerly Woolworth's. [Barbara Ann Hardin, Larry Hardin]

[370] The store manager, Paula Roebke, joins us. Paula has managed Fains for four years and was transferred here by Belks in another city.

[378] When the State Employment Office sent Juanita to Fains to be a cashier, the store used pneumatic tubes to send the money and sales slips to the second floor. Paula remembers this vacuum tube system from her childhood.

[429] Prior to coming to Fains, Juanita worked as an accountant and auditor for a CPA.

[443] Juanita and Paula explain the "lay-away" system (see Mary Ellen Woolcott). Everyone put something on lay-away at one time or another - paying 20% down and placing the item on a shelf upstairs until the total was paid - 3 equal payments plus \$1.00 service charge. Now items are taken home immediately and, with no service charge until the 91st day. Payment is now due 30, 60, then 90 days after purchase. A charge card has taken the place of the "lay-away" system.

[491] For nine years Juanita was treasurer of First Presbyterian Church under Robinson. She attended Cecil's and Blanton's (Asheville business colleges) at night. [Joseph Douglas Robinson]

[542] Paula graduated from college with a BSAB in Market and Managing (a double major). She worked for Belks while in High School and joined the Belk Management Program.

[562] Fains bought seconds and could not undersell Belks regular merchandise.

[576] Paula said that most large stores had Bargain Basements, later budget stores evolved, calling them irregulars and close-outs. Belks used Fains as an outlet, transferring their unsold regulars while purchasing irregulars for sale. Belks is going through another evolution. Their outlets will be called "TAG."

Side 2:

Merchandising is going through changes. It is hard getting irregulars as many stores have their own outlet. The Blue Ridge Mall is an example of this though the items are often as high as in the regular stores. Paula has been with Belks since 1982. Belks uses "scanners" now, which registers the items and prices, supermarket uses "bar coding" but Fains is still using the old "punching" machine to record item and price.

[2/45] The major expense for a company is personnel. There have been changes in compensation - medical coverage, profit sharing and retirement benefits.

[2/67] Belks has always been "pro employee" and gives all of the above plus sick days and paid vacations.

[2/85] There are about 240 Belk stores in the Southeast. Corporate offices are in Charlotte, buying offices are in New York. William Henry Belk started the chain 100 years ago. The family has always contributed to the community. There is the Belk Theatre on campus. (see book)

[2/111] In recent years, millions of square feet of store space have opened in the Asheville area. This is especially difficult for small stores which must be prepared to run in the red for three to

five years before becoming established. There are smaller pieces of the pie for all stores and merchants must cut expenses in any way they can.

[2/145] Juanita comments on the change in Patton Avenue with the coming of the malls. It used to be impossible to get through the crowded sidewalks which were packed with people. One had to step into the street. Now you can walk down the middle of the street.

[2/156] The clientele coming to Fains has not changed over the years. They watch the discounts and items are kept until sold. A "dot" system indicating 25% to 75% off is used. If necessary, items are sold below cost - there is no final destination. When the "lay-away" system was used, patrons might take their item off the shelf when there was a sale in order to take advantage of the sale.

[2/201] Paula said that all retailers are having a hard time and unless a store fills a unique niche in the community it probably will fail.

[2/212] As an employee of Belks, Paula may be moved within the group. If her husband is transferred, she can contact the manager to be transferred also.

[2/212 - 2/267] Material is repeat of previous statements.

[2/267] At one time Belks had a number of budget stores like Fains but that changed with the development of K-Marts and Walmarts. Downtown trade dwindled and there are few budget stores left. Belks used to have a regular store in the center of town, when they moved to the Asheville Mall, they kept Fains as an outlet since they already had the property but now business has dwindled. Five to 10% of Fains goods was transferred from Belks, the rest was purchased.

[2/304] Paula's boss is Pine who reports to Belk who is a family member. Pine is a Senior Vice President. [Charles Pine, Erwin Belk]

[2/338] I asked about the name of Fains and was handed "Belk, a Century of Retail Leadership" and read on page 17 that a salesman so inspired Belk with his ability that he became manager of five "Leader" stores. (see book) [O.N. "Red" Fain, Henry Belk]

[2/381] Juanita said she was pleased to have a profit-sharing program with the store. When her mother was working, there was no protection for the worker.

[2/408] With the closing of the stores, new jobs are being found employees. Paula has her new assignment. Her 4-month-old son is in day care. She is satisfied with the care he is receiving and drops in to see him during the day but she would prefer staying home with him or having a family member look after him. She and her husband talk about the American concept of progress, where every generation is better off than the one before. They think their generation is back sliding. [John Paul Roebke, Mark Roebke]

[2/456] Juanita's daughter works in a day care facility and is impressed with the quality of program for the children. She thinks her daughter would have benefited from the sophisticated educational approach now used. [Barbara Ann Hardin]

[2/458] Juanita hopes that the economic situation will improve. Paula said that hours are longer than before, pay is less and business is streamlined - a very sharp pencil.

Post Script

5/12/96 Mrs. Joynes contacted Juanita regarding name spelling and learned that the two Asheville Belks have been sold to the Simpson group. Paula has lost her job and offered to take transfer to Sylva. The rest of the Fains employees are out of jobs - downsizing.