

A May 14 article by Jacob Doran, in the Bigfork Summer Playhouse supplement, describes Bigfork, before the arrival of Bo Brown and his "Theatre by the Bay," as a "little fishing village [that] held four churches, three gas stations, three bars and little else... There were no tourists, because there were no attractions...In fact...the reason most people hit their brakes when passing the Village was to either have a beer or gas up their car."

I beg to differ. I am a Bigfork native who grew up in Bigfork in the 1950s and 1960s. My parents owned one of those three bars. Actually, there were four at one time. During those years, downtown Bigfork had a lot more than he describes. Perhaps most important were the private residences along Electric, Osborne, and Bridge Street, including 11 homes along the two blocks of Electric Avenue, alone. All were occupied, with families and retired couples who spent their dollars in the community.

In addition to the churches, service stations and bars, two retail stores anchored the village at opposite ends: Houston's Grocery & Meat Locker (later became Bigfork Drug), and Bigfork Mercantile. I worked at the Merc during my teen years. It was a thriving business that met the year-round needs of the community, including groceries, hardware, lumber, clothing, shoes, sundries, housewares, and sporting goods.

Also a hotel, beauty shop, barber shop, doctor's office, real estate office, fishing tackle shop, three cafes, post office, and liquor store that also sold gifts and jewelry. Just across the old bridge were two family-oriented fishing resorts; and Flathead Lake Lodge less than a mile down the road.

Our community hall served us through all seasons, as lodge and dance hall, meeting place, movie and community theatre. The public dock offered a protected swimming area complete with diving board platform. And let's not forget our school!

Bigfork was the commercial heart of its surrounding agricultural community (as it had been for over 50 years prior to my arrival), and just happened to attract fisherman and tourists who came for the recreation. It didn't need big-ticket tourist attractions to cause people to "hit their brakes;" it had families and individuals who were invested in the life and commerce of their home town.

It was this lively community, and not just its beautiful setting, that attracted the Browns in the first place. I know, because my parents were early supporters of the theatre concept, and championed the motto: "Stay Three Days, See Three Plays."