

Growing up in Queens, N.Y. in the 1970s, everything I knew about Saratoga I had learned in a four-minute song about vanity and horses by Carly Simon. A quarter-century later, visiting the city that calls itself “the summer place to be,” I was struck by the palpable buzz that emanated from a vibrant downtown, by the classic and slightly creepy Victorian architecture framing Broadway, and by the underground flow of natural springs that had dispensed “healing” waters to visitors for several centuries. I decided to stay.

One of my first assignments was to interview a man nearing the century mark who lived in a health care center not far from the spot where 200 years earlier Gideon Putnam first laid out the village that would become a city.

Hoisting his bony frame up from the couch, the man moved towards a large living room window that offered a view of the neighborhood a dozen floors below. He gestured to Broadway where the glamorous hotels once stood, and pointed to a vacant lot on Division Street where Ralph and Floyd Ellsworth sold their ice cream to little kids. “Right there was where it was,” the old man said. Behind him, a wood shelf cradled a neat pile of boxes that held board games: Risk, Trivial Pursuit, and the Game of Life, among them. A travel book titled *A Lover’s Guide to Paris* slumped in the corner, spine-out.

He talked about summers of silence during the war years when the visitors stopped coming, and how clumps of unruly weeds sprouted up at the deserted racecourse. He remembered that youngsters who normally spent the summer hustling parking spaces for a quarter, instead collected cans for the war effort and took turns standing atop the Lake Avenue Armory to act as lookouts for enemy planes. He remembered sipping on King Orange soda that went for a nickel a pop.

He stared out the window a long time as if looking to find his younger self moving among the mass of people below. And it quickly became obvious that amid the influx of new-comers calling Saratoga Springs their home and the cacophony of modern architecture growing atop the city's sidewalks, there was a current running beneath the city that contained everything that had come before. And it was in these two worlds simultaneous filled with joy and sorrow and glamour and tragedy that these Saratoga stories happened, in a place of magic and loss.

- Thomas Dimopoulos

*April 7, 2015, on the 100th anniversary of the incorporation of the city of Saratoga Springs*