

Waiting for the Mail

Home Sweet Home

POST OFFICE BOX 23, Chalybeate, Mississippi. That was my family's mailing address in the small community where I grew up, over 45 years ago.

It was my job to walk the quarter mile to the post office to get the mail. Many days, I made several trips to see if the daily mail had arrived and been sorted.

The post office was actually in the front and on one side of an old store located in the middle of the block of stores that made up "town." Inside the double doors were no more than 50 rent-free mailboxes.

In the early years, I could barely reach our box and often had help from my taller friend Nancy Hollis, who met me there to get her family's mail from Box 22.

Although the official-looking, brass-front boxes had combination locks, few box holders even knew their code numbers and usually kept their box set to be quickly and easily opened.

Besides, there were few secrets in town because the postmistress, Mrs. Jones, who lived in the back of the store, was well informed of any news that came in or went out on the penny postcards.

From the sidewalk of the glass-fronted store was a full view of the post office work area. As kids, we enjoyed spying on Mrs. Jones as she read the cards, examined the letters and rattled the packages.

We made a game of avoiding her many comments and questions: "That sure is a big package" or "Your daddy got a letter all the way from New York!"

But it was harmless curiosity, and I don't think anyone really complained. I do know that I miss the trust and harmony that prevailed in the community and having a postmistress who sorted our mail by name, rather than merely "Box 23."

—Shelley Jamieson, Brentwood, Tennessee