

Sketch

Volume 69, Number 1

2004

Article 4

Lessons at the Star

Rochelle Rohden*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©2004 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

Lessons at the Star

Rochelle Rohden

It's Friday night in Gowrie and everyone is headed to the Star. In this little town of 1200 there are four hot spots for the eight to eighteen set; the swimming pool, the skating rink, whatever high school sport is being played at home on any given Tuesday or Friday night, and the Star Theater. I am in junior high, so the skating rink is not cool, the pool closed when school started in August, and, this particular Friday night our hometown heroes, the Prairie Panthers, are grunting and sweating on a football field forty miles away. Everyone in the 8th grade is headed to the movies, and I have a date.

The Star is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights all year round. It was built for silent pictures and the original aubergine velvet curtains still hang in the ticket booth where Mrs. Nelson pushes a ticket across the window ledge to you after you slide her your quarter. She doesn't smile or speak and she never picks a ticket up and hands it to you. She slides it, hidden under her fingers like she's passing secret information. We think she could be a spy because she has a photographic memory; she knows what night every kid attends a movie. This is important because you can get in for free if you already paid once that weekend - if your mom and dad will let you go to the same movie again. Of course, most of the movies are in their third or fourth run through the theaters by the time they get here, which limits the repeat visits. No one sneaks past Mrs. Nelson.

With two more dimes, you can get a bag of popcorn or one of Grandma Nelson's Jell-o and corn syrup popcorn balls with a few old maids in each one and a bottle of Pepsi Cola. While you are making your selection at the pop machine, you can holler up the ladder to Old Man Nelson where he is getting the projector ready. If you get there before your friends do, you can crawl up the ladder and visit with him while he loads the huge reels onto the arms of the projector. You can't stand up straight in the loft where the projectors are, so if his lumbago is acting up he might even ask you to help.

This particular Friday night, the movie is a World War II flick. A lot of WWII movies play at the Star. Mr. Nelson - Red to everyone in town - is big in the American Legion and he likes war movies. Red's job at the theater is flashlight patrol. Once or twice