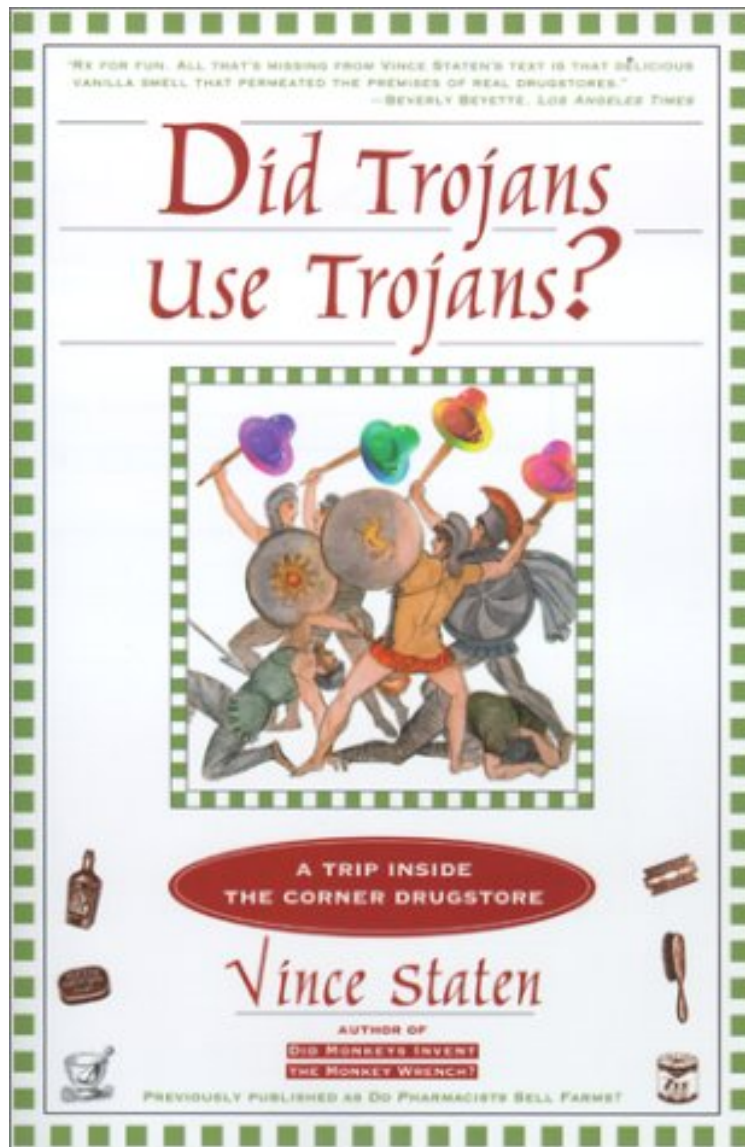


(Mobile ebook) Did Trojans Use Trojans?: A Trip Inside the Corner Drugstore

Did Trojans Use Trojans?: A Trip Inside the Corner Drugstore

Vince Staten

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Vince Staten : Did Trojans Use Trojans?: A Trip Inside the Corner Drugstore before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Did Trojans Use Trojans?: A Trip Inside the Corner Drugstore:

Continuing his delightful tour of cherished American institutions, the writer who explored grocery stores in "Can You

Trust a Tomato in January?" and hardware emporiums in "Did Monkeys Invent the Monkey Wrench?" now takes readers down the aisles of the corner drugstore, the heart of small-town America. Staten re-creates the glorious array of salves, patent medicines and mysterious lotions packed on drugstore shelves, bringing to life the trusted pharmacist who explained it all. His charming stories will stir up a host of memories: the dating rituals conducted at the soda fountain; those life-changing decisions about hair coloring; and perhaps those whispered requests for condoms.

Katherine A. Powers The Boston Globe [Staten] understands the fascination we have for the origins of the things we take for granted and does a good job of revealing them. -- Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1: Down at the Old Corner Drug: Elbowing My Way In There we are on page 97 of my high school yearbook: Cynthia Perry and Dale Hickam, Jean Rogers and Danny Pomeroy, Steve Lambert and Mary McAlpine, and my elbow, just creeping into the frame. We were posing for the yearbook photographer at the local teen hangout, the soda fountain of Armour's Drugs. Armour's was just two blocks from school. An easy walk, except that no one walked. We drove. We were seniors. Armour's Drugs was the place to see and be seen, to nurse a cherry Coke for an hour while you kept your eye on the front door, hoping that SHE -- whoever she was this week -- would stroll in. And also hoping that SHE wouldn't be with some other boy. And maybe she would sit down next to you and you could call out to Mabel to get you another straw and you two could sit there, sharing a cherry Coke, like a picture out of The Saturday Evening Post. Maybe that's why I got cut out of the picture that long-ago day. I wasn't with someone; I was watching for HER. That was the drugstore of my youth. A social center for teenagers, and a community center for adults. While we sat around posing for that photo perhaps a dozen moms came in, some to pick up prescriptions, others to pick up what are today grocery items: toothpaste, shampoo, aspirin. They would stop and talk with old Doc Armour, because he was the master of ceremonies of the drugstore. He did more than dispense drugs from his perch in the back of the store. He also dispensed gossip and advice. He knew it all -- who was sick, who was well, who was in the hospital, who was back at home. There was always a new patent medicine to cure the common cold, a new ointment for backaches and a new powder for itches. Maybe he was practicing medicine without a license, but that's what family pharmacists did in the sixties. Drugs were Doc Armour's main business. That was, after all, his middle name: Armour's Drug Store. Back then, no one just ran into the drugstore, grabbed up their stuff and ran right out. The drugstore was a place to linger, to catch up. Even eat. I had many a drugstore lunch in my youth. When my mother and I would "go to town" (a weekly event, even though we only lived five hundred feet outside the city limits), we'd always have lunch at Freel's Drug, home of the best grilled cheese sandwich in America. The drugstore was the cracker barrel of the city. Armour's Drugs was the place where my crowd congregated after school. But by the time we got around to posing for the yearbook photo, Armour's was on its way out as the place to see and be seen. Heck, it closed at six o'clock. There was this new place up the road, right across the street from my father's hardware store, as a matter of fact, and this new place stayed open well into the night. There was no counter and no booths and no place to sit except on the hood of your car, but by 1965 McDonald's was well on its way to supplanting the corner drug as the gathering spot of our culture. * Corner Drug. No name says "small town" like Corner Drug. No name evokes memories of soda fountains and Saturday afternoons like Corner Drug. Corner Drug is where Grandma met Grandpa, where Mom bought her first home permanent and Dad his first rubber (that's condom, to you kids). It was once a staple of every downtown, the place where mothers met in the morning to gossip, where businessmen lunched and cut deals, where teenagers crowded in after school for a soda and a smile. My godmother, who got married in 1934, celebrated with a wedding dinner at the soda fountain of Bunting's Drugs in Bristol, Virginia. "We got three hot dogs for a dime. He ate two and I ate one." But downtown corners have lost their luster, replaced by malls, and Corner Drug stores have been snapped up by Rite-Aid and Revco, who may give the old Corner Drugs a big-time name, but they rob the places of their identities. There are only seventy-one drugstores named Corner Drug remaining, according to my search of business phone directory listings. There's no way of knowing how many there once were, but every town had one. A few of the remaining Corner Drugs have moved away from the corner to a strip center, retaining their old name if not their old location. But most have held on to that coveted downtown corner, even as downtown has changed. As the owner of Corner Drugs in Llano, Texas, put it, "We've been here forever." * I surveyed the surviving members of the Corner Drug fraternity to find out how they've changed and how they've remained the same. Of the seventy-one drug stores named Corner Drug, fifty-one agreed to answer a few questions. (Isn't it good to know that fully 28 percent of all Corner Drug store owners are suspicious of someone who calls on the phone claiming to be writing a book about drugstores?) Changing times and changing fashions have hurt the soda fountain business. In 1948, 60 percent of America's drugstores had working soda fountains, according to that year's edition of Remington's Practice of Pharmacy. Only 20 percent of today's Corner Drugs -- ten stores -- have soda fountains. And only four of those ten serve lunch. One serves ice cream only; the others offer fountain service. In a nod to modern times, two other Corner Drug stores have coffee bars. Photo finishing, a drugstore staple for a century, has fared better: 70 percent of Corner Drugs still offer that old drug store standby. The day of the family-owned pharmacy isn't over either. But the big corporations have made an attempt to corner the Corner Drug market -- they now own 40 percent of the drugstores I surveyed. How old are Corner Drugs? They are as old as God and as new as Zantac 75. Corner Drug in Sigourney,

Iowa, was founded in 1875, the year before Rutherford B. Hayes was voted into office. (The state was only twenty-nine years old at the time.) One encouraging sign about the future of Corner Drugs is that they are still being built in the nineties. Corner Drug of Buffalo, Missouri, opened in 1991, and the Corner Drug Store at 451 Third Avenue in New York City opened in 1992. The average age of these Corner Drugs is sixty-seven (founded in 1930). If you're into math, the median age is sixty-nine. Most Corner Drug stores are legitimate corner drugstores, located on the corner of two intersecting streets in the downtown area. But one -- Corner Drug of Durant, Oklahoma -- is located "in" a corner. Three used to be on corners, but have moved. Corner Drug in Lake City, Tennessee, used to be on the corner, but other businesses in the east Tennessee town have built up around it and now it is in the middle of the block. Corner Drug of Cattaraugus, New York, is on a dangerous corner by a steep hill, and the store has been hit by cars several times. One druggist -- that guy at Corner Drug in Llano, Texas -- felt compelled to tell us that his store had only been on a corner for ninety-nine years. It didn't move to the corner until 1898, five years after the store's founding. The Corner Drug in Driggs, Idaho, gets our nod as best source for one-stop shopping: It's called Corner Drug Hardware. Whether the store is an old-timer or a newborn, the folks at Corner Drug have some stories to tell. That's because in most places the local pharmacist is much more approachable than the doctor. He'll even pick up the phone. At Corner Drug in Columbus, Texas, they still laugh about the woman who thought "free delivery" meant that she didn't have to pay when they delivered it to her house. A woman called Corner Drug in Lander, Wyoming, panicked that her children had cooked her birth control pills in the toaster. She said they were a little brown and wondered if they were still good. (They were.) The ladies at Corner Drug in Bethany, Missouri, were taken aback