

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,  
Back in the nineteen thirties, before malls, shopping centers and television, downtown Eureka was a busy place. Every week, on Saturday night, the stores remained open until Nine PM. There was a heavy concentration of stores of all types located on both sides of Fifth Street between "D" and "H" Street and both sides of "F" Street between Fourth and Sixth streets. It was a time when the family could gather after dinner and do the weekly shopping. As you can imagine motor traffic was heavy as well as pedestrian traffic. Drivers were coming and going, looking for parking places as well as "cruising" the scene. Oh yes, we also had trolley cars in the mix with Fifth and E being a major transfer point. There was a steady stream of pedestrians walking, more like strolling, in all directions. They not only shopped but took the time to visit with friends and neighbors they happened to meet during their sojourn. My parents and I would eat an early dinner and head for downtown. We would get an early start so Dad could find a good parking spot usually on Fifth Street between E and F. Dad had an artificial leg and it was hard for him to walk any distance so, once parked, we were in a position to watch all the people walking by and my parents could visit with those they knew. This became a weekly social event. Of course we are talking about mild summer evenings. With the car windows rolled down we were able to enjoy both the surrounding sights and sounds. About mid-evening you would hear the strains of band music. Somewhere around Eight PM the Salvation Army band would leave their headquarters, located at Fifth and "D" Streets, for their march up Fifth Street to the intersection of F Street where they would provide a short concert, preach the word of God and then return, marching and playing, back to headquarters. They were a small group of musicians but very dedicated, drawing the attention of many shoppers who would stop to listen. Later, during the forties and fifties in particular, "cruise nights" were popular with the younger set as they became better able to afford and maintain newer flashier cars. The age old routine of boys and girls meeting and dating had drastically changed with "cruising" playing a large part in that change. As I reminisce, did "cruise nights" really start then? Not in my mind. I think they started back in the thirties when the streets and sidewalks of Eureka boomed with cars and people. It wasn't dedicated to only the youth having a good time; it was an opportunity for friendship and a social gathering for all ages plus making shopping a fun family event rather than a chore. It could have been referred to as "family cruise night".

Fred Nelson for Community Comment