

Through the years

1963: North Hills Shopping Center opens at Six Forks Road and the Bellline. It's considered the boomdocks.



MSO FILE PHOTO

1966: Ivey's opens.

1967: North Hills becomes the first enclosed mall between Washington and Atlanta. A newspaper story announces: "To paraphrase the old prospector, there's gold in them thar North Hills." In its heyday, North Hills draws shoppers from all over Eastern North Carolina.

May 29, 1972: On Memorial Day, 11 people are shot, four fatally, by a gunman in the North Hills parking lot. The shooter, a 22-year-old high school janitor, then kills himself. No reason is ever found for his actions.

August 1972: Crabtree Valley Mall celebrates its grand opening.

December 1979: According to its manager, North Hills Fashion Mall and Plaza closes out the decade with record sales. J.C. Penney, Ronson, North Hills Pharmacy and Revlon Bar complete extensive remodeling during the year; five new stores open — The Chesapeake Company, Hooper's ladies sportswear, The Gap, Joyce-Selby shoes and Raggamuffin, a restaurant.

June 1980: Three North Hills stores — J.C. Penney, Ivey's and Woolworth — begin regular Sunday afternoon shopping hours.

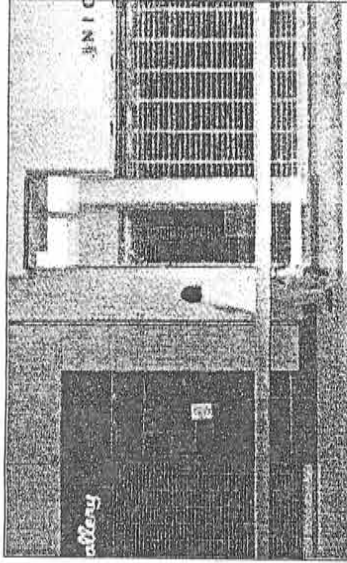
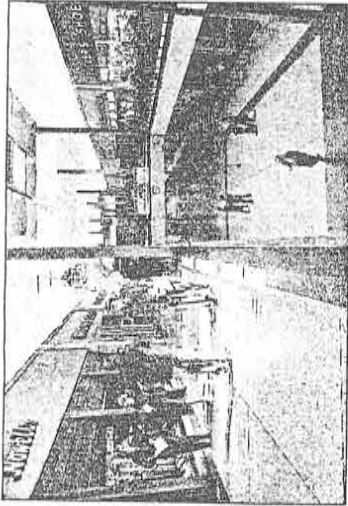
August 1980: Developer Ed Richards sells the mall to KLM Royal Dutch Airlines pension fund.

February 1983: Now 20, North Hills Fashion Mall begins a major renovation. With the new look, the mall hopes to attract younger, more affluent customers.

October 1984: North Hills celebrates its "grand reopening" after an 18-month, \$3 million renovation that features eight new stores. Raleigh Mayor Avery Upchurch and Miss North Carolina Francesca Adler are on hand.



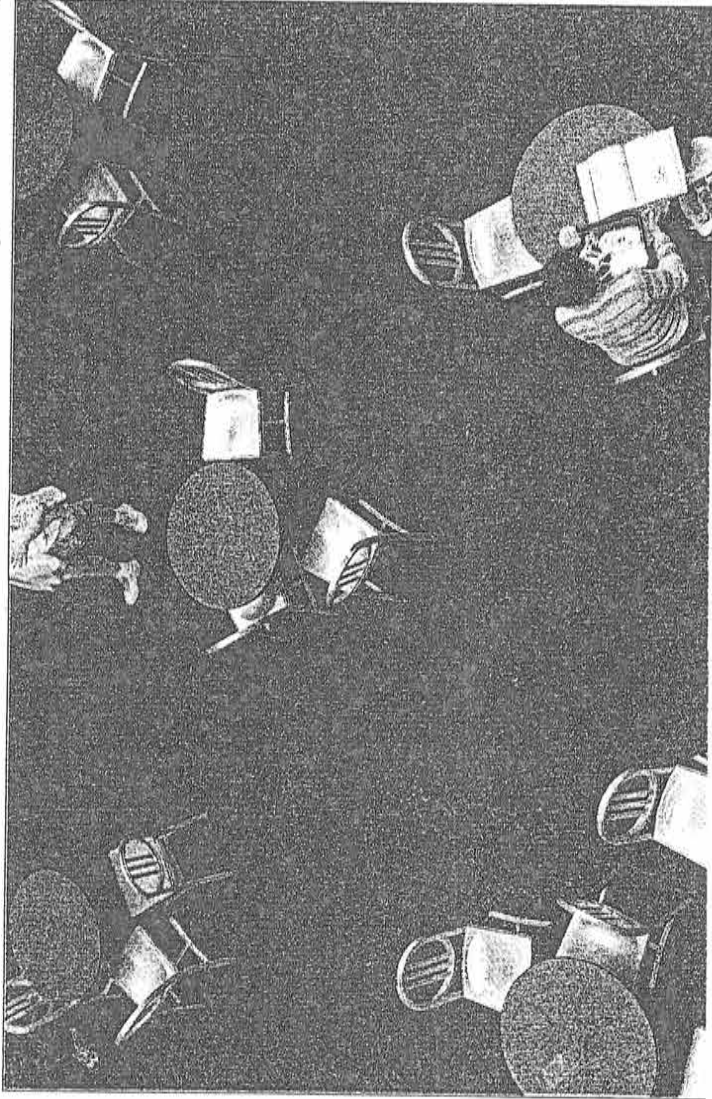
Last stop: Woolworth's. Upstairs the powders and perfumes and lotions, plus a small diner with swivel stools. Downstairs the cheap canvas sneakers and bathmats and parakeets and fish.



During North Hills' heyday in the 1970s, special promotions and sales drew shoppers to local stores and big chains.

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Shoppers who come to North Hills today find shuttered stores as the mall begins its transition to the new life its owner hopes for.





MOORE PHOTO

May 1990: Arkansas-based Dillard's announces it will buy Ivey's.

1991: North Hills gets another face-lift in response to the opening of Crossroads and the expansion of Cary Towne Center.

1993: The mall announces that Woolworth will leave to make way for more desirable tenants.

1994: Plans for Triangle Town Center off Capital Boulevard are announced. North Hills Mall is for sale again.

December 1995: North Hills Mall releases details of a three-year, \$50 million expansion to be completed by the end of 1998. K&W Cafeteria closes.

1997: Expansion is delayed until 1998.

1998: Nags Head Properties purchases the mall for \$11.5 million but has no firm redevelopment plans.

2000: Nags Head Properties seeks to sell North Hills Mall.

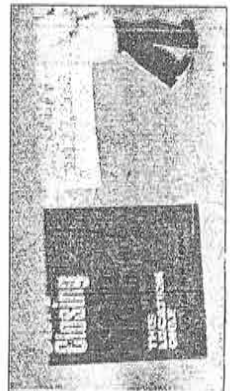
December 2000: Developer John Kane buys North Hills Mall. Kane already owns North Hills Plaza across Lassiter Mill Road from the mall. He'll renovate and rename it The Lassiter.

March 2001: Dillard's announces it will move to Triangle Town Center when it opens in 2002. The North Hills store will close.

December 2001: North Hills Mall has its last holiday shopping season. Most of the mall will be demolished to make way for larger stores.

January 2002: Neighbors and North Hills loyalists await specifics from Kane about his plans.

COMPILED BY NEWS RESEARCHER DENISE JONES



NORTH HILLS

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line. I would try anything that landed on my tray right down to the gelatin cubes, but my favorite entrees were the chicken and dumplings or the spaghetti served with an ice-cream scoop. The gluey noodles and sauce retained the shape of the scoop. I'd alternate between slivers of chocolate or lemon meringue pie for dessert. All the adults smoked cigarettes, and their smoke mingled freely with the smell of cooked food and a sort of fog hung over the dining room. I did not find it unpleasant.

At summer's end when we went back-to-school shopping, I learned the byzantiums of fashion. The Gap was for Levi's or peer; store-brand knock-offs were subject to peer ridicule. If you were tentative to fade, you might find yourself conspicuously loling a lunchbox when everyone else had gone back to brown bagging, or still scribbling with an archaic No. 2 pencil in a season of erasable black. Book bags or backpacks were for a time verboten, carrying more books than could be deftly tucked under an arm suggested you favored learning and put you in the enemy camp. When the right items had been procured, my sister and I would raid The Record Bar for its free book covers printed with album art. In the fourth grade all of my school texts were protected by Shaun Cassidy's smash hit LP, "Under Wraps."

The arts supply store, HumeGate's, thrilled me with its smooth charcoal sticks, papers of every texture, and airy balsawood planks meant for some Lilliputian construction project. Through glass I could monitor the progress of the adjacent hobby shop's sprawling miniature train set. Its expansion across sprawling hills of green felt seemed relentless, evermore busy shrubbery and scrubby pines, end-to-end barbershops, ice-cream parlors and general stores. Pinky-mail people frozen in attitudes of greeting, waiting or work. Bright enameled boxcars linked and looping through tunnels, over bridges, barely pausing at the station.

Last stop: Woolworth's. Upstairs the powders and perfumes and lotions, plus a small diner with swivel stools. Downstairs the cheap canvases sneakers and bathmats and parakeets and fish. We selected bowl at home needed constant replenishment. When North Hills housed the public library, the arrangement seemed custom-made for my mom and me, she was a fanatical shopper and I was a bookworm. She could drop me off and hit the stores for as long as she liked, and I could sit and read until enlisted to try on corduroys or help carry packages to the car. Sadly, my library visits dwindled considerably when it relocated, though her shopping sojourns continue unabated to this day.

Her favorite department store was Charlotte-based Ivey's — she still calls it by its original name, Ivey Taylor's. It was a little upscale, classy even, and my mom was pretty and stylish and earned her own money, so she permitted herself the occasional indulgence. My father preferred to buy his clothes at J.C. Penney on the other side of the mall, which she deemed "cheapo." So even in this regard they

Maureen Creech reads while having lunch on a recent Saturday.

SAFE PHOTOS BY SUSANA YEA

were at opposite ends. By the time Dillard's bought out Ivey's, they'd both remarried, and my mom was living out of state, so she missed out on a mighty clearance sale. Dillard's gutted the place, threw out all the fixtures and furnishings, everything Ivey's. I went Dumpster diving for mannequins with a friend. We found a lot of torsos, stray limbs. Nothing left intact.

Death in the parking lot

On May 29, 1972, the year Crabtree opened, a 22-year-old school janitor withdrew his savings from the bank, paid his father the \$30 he'd borrowed, purchased a .22-caliber Martin rifle and opened fire in the North Hills parking lot. He struck 11 people, wounding seven and killing four. Five, he turned the gun on himself. Nobody knows why. There was a lot of shooting going on. People were still talking about the sniper in Texas, George "Segregation Forever" Wallace sent his condolences to the people of North Carolina from his hospital bed, a bullet in his spine.

It was getting to where you could identify the house, people said. My dad's best friend, R.B. Stokes, was there when the shooting began and he dragged a wounded person indoors to safety. I don't know whether the person R.B. brought inside survived, and I can't ask R.B. because he died recently. He was not one to boast, so I doubt anyone outside of my dad and the person R.B. helped ever knew about it.

I was 3 at the time of the shooting at North Hills. I don't remember it, but my dad tells me he'd taken my sister and me shopping that morning and we hadn't left the mall more than an hour before it began. When I ask my mom about it, she swears this is the first she has heard of our being there. She may, in fact, call my father up 30 years later to berate him for unwittingly putting us near harm's way, and then worse, failing to disclose the information.

Browsing and dallying

In high school I had a very stern but scrupulously just algebra teacher who moonlighted as a manager at J.C. Penney. Whenever I heard her being paged over the intercom, my face would burn with shame because she was holding down two jobs while I browsed and dalled, neglecting my math homework. My then-boyfriend worked at the place that made big cookies, the ones they slice like a pizza. During his tenure the company developed a big granola cookie, but some trademark issue prevented them from calling it granola in their promotions, so they named it Granola-la and put musical notes all around it. The boyfriend transcended this soon after by attending a very good university whereupon we quickly lost contact.

My sister got her prom dress at Housner's, a boutique on the Ivey's end of the mall. The dress was wedding-gown white and shimmering, with spaghetti straps and a full skirt. I'm sure she was beautiful.

ful, blond hair swirling and skin so tan against the white satin, but I hated her back then and couldn't see it. Later I borrowed the dress for my junior prom, which I attended with the cookie guy, and I was not one bit beautiful. That wasn't supposed to matter, because we were going to the prom to be ironic. But I wanted to be ironic and beautiful.

I went away to college and I lived out of state for several years after that. Each visit home brought some startling change to my attention. I'd turn down a street I thought I knew (Shelley Road, for example) and it wouldn't take me where I wanted to go (Shelley Lake nowhere in sight). Driving into downtown from 401 I discerned to my astonishment a sort of skyline. Coming in from the opposite direction on Atlantic Avenue, I saw it again, a cluster of skyscrapers (well — tallish buildings, let's say) rising from the tree line. Radiating out from that core were new schools and subdivisions, brew pubs and jazz clubs, sushi bars and day spas, all suspended in a matrix of shopping centers. The traffic had gotten serious and turned upscale military, jeeps and trucks and all-terrain hybrids glossed up and shod with beefy tires, malevolent chrome grills like grinning teeth bearing you down. They were past North Hills, that plain brown loaf, and so did I.

Now it is Ghost Mall. Tumbleweeds and the stray bargain-hunter drift past the vacant stores. What makes me still love North Hills is what killed it: the quiet refuge it came to provide, a Zenlike retreat during the holiday hustle. Its makeover attempts over the years made me root for it, though the results were not unlike a fading startlet with an avalanching face-lift angling desperately for a comeback.

Perhaps its very failure to thrive absolves it from the sins marks are said to represent: heedless development, greedy consumption, decadence and waste. It didn't change nearly so much as Raleigh did, which made it steadfast but doomed. I don't know what North Hills means to me. It's a place I went with my family, or with one parent or another, then just my sister, just my friends, or by myself. From Infant to Junior to Misses, I marveled at stuff and disdained stuff and wanted stuff I couldn't have and got stuff I didn't want. Meanwhile, it kept the rain off my head. No more and no less. To pay my respects, I'll wander the halls and purchase cut-price mementos until the place is rubble, for time is the Ultimate Clearance Event, reducing malls and mountains and men alike. Everything Must Go.

June Spence is the author of the short story collection "Missing Women and Others" (Riverhead Books). She is the 2001-2002 Kenan Writing Writer at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She offers her thanks to North Hills security officer Oscar Taylor, who confirmed her memories of businesses at the mall, reminded her of c-hers and validated the existence of the petting zoo.