

# Our Town Redoux

A Play in one Act

Act 1 Scene 1:

**Narrator:** “Welcome to Sawtown, USA. Population 6,734. It was 6,735 but widower Johnston died earlier today.

Our story takes place in front of 602 Cedar Street a two story Victorian built in 1902 for the plant manager of the Sawtown Lumber Company for the unbelievable sum of \$28,000. Not only did it include indoor plumbing but it also had gas lights and shortly thereafter was transformed to something called electricity.

*The rate of home ownership for working class families has fallen since 1978. In 1978, 62.5% of working class families owned their own homes. By 2003, this had fallen to 59% and continues to decline.*

In 1922 the house was sold to the head electrician at the mill for \$38,000 two years after the union won their first wage increase following a 4 month sit-in strike.

In 1947, it was sold to the head rig operator who used part of his GI benefits to fund the purchase price of \$55,000.

The recently deceased Mr. Johnston purchased it in 1969 with the monthly savings he accrued from the creation of a union management multi-employer trust for health insurance which provided full coverage for his entire family. He paid \$85,000 for a fixed 30 year mortgage. Union membership that year included 1,000 mill workers and 500 forest workers including log truck drivers.”

*Enter stage left, Karla Smith: Sawtown realtor.*

**K Smith:** “Why are buyers always late? It didn’t used to be this way. When I was selling to residents they were on time. It was a sign of respect. Now these vacation property buyers are too relaxed. They’re in no hurry and if their time isn’t important when they’re on vacation why do they assume that my time isn’t either?”

**Narrator:** “The dot com bubble fueled the first wave of tourists to become home buyers here in Sawtown. Even after the bubble burst they still came. Not so often but in enough numbers to keep prices high. Houses in Sawtown just a few years ago used to sell for \$150,000 for 1,700 square feet with a view of either the mountain and its forests or the water. Nowadays, it takes 300,000 to buy the same place. From the point of view of some one living on commissions this is a good deal.

**K Smith:** “I wonder why my neighbors are letting these great old Sawntown houses be bought up by out-of-towners? The Victorians especially are hard to see sold to others. Their large porches being at one time, not so long ago, a key ingredient of Sawtown

society. I can remember when a walk down Pine Street could take an hour with the mandatory social stop at every other porch. The tourists are too busy to spend time on their porches having to cram an entire summer's worth of living into a few weeks and a few more week-ends."

**Narrator:** "She not only profits from the sales of these historic houses but also enjoys the changes at the new chain grocery which arrived soon after the tourists. Now she can buy cheeses from France, wine from Chile, even apples from New Zealand. The old "mom and pop" was much smaller and didn't have anywhere near the variety or selection. Relying on local produce meant fewer fresh fruits and vegetables during the winter months and by March eating winter squash and apples got a little old. She does however, miss real tomatoes. The chain store tomatoes look great but just don't have the taste of real ones fresh from the local farmers that used to be sold by the "mom and pop".

She remembered selling one of those small farms to a dot com millionaire right before the market crashed. Never did figure out why that family sold such a wonderful place. If her memory was correct that family had lived there for three generations."

*Enter the buyers, Biff and Buffy*

**Biff:** Sorry we're late but there was a picket line by the plywood mill and we had to stop and take pictures. Wait till my friends back home see these."

**K Smith:** "The strikes over health insurance and wages, I think. The company was bought out by a national corporation last year and they want the workers to pay more for health insurance, work longer hours, and have mandatory overtime."

**Biff:** "We don't have company paid health insurance at the brokerage firm. I certainly wouldn't risk my job over a few hundred dollars a month. In fact, I simply cash in some of my stock options once a year and use that money to pay for our family's health insurance. That's the same source of money I'll be using for the down payment."

**K Smith:** "The company made a 15% return on capital at the mill last year. That put it below its corporate targets so they need to make some changes, reduce some jobs and keep pay raises below 2%."

**Biff:** "Thanks for the tour. What are they asking for this one?"

**K Smith:** "It's 325,000. Used to be owned by a log truck driver, been in the family for 50 years. He retired and then contracted some kind of heart disease. They need to downsize in order to pay his medical and funeral bills. However, I must tell you there's another couple from LA who were here yesterday who are very interested."

**Biff:** "We saw a small commercial building on the corner that's closed what was it?"

**K Smith:** “That used to be a small grocery store, but it closed a few years after the new chain one came in across town. Increased traffic a bit but it’s only a short drive away.”

**Buffy:** “Let’s make an offer of \$335,000. It’s a great location, beautiful, very relaxing and so close to both the mountains and the water. I can’t imagine why anyone would ever want to leave this place. I just don’t understand why the townies are leaving?”

**Narrator:** “The realtor knows the answer but doesn’t want to acknowledge it besides it might jinx the sale.”

**K Smith:** “Well, I guess not everyone can see the wonderful things that you do.”

*Curtain closes*