

# Small-town sodas and smiles

Das kleine Café ist ein Stück heile Welt, denn das einzige Problem ist, sich für eine der leckeren Kreationen zu entscheiden.

**RITA FORBES** schwelgt in Vanille-Eis mit Schokosauce und ein paar Erinnerungen.

Summers in the Midwest are hot and humid. You start to sweat just looking out the window, as the heat shimmers in the air. But in the air-conditioned room where I sit, the only thing sweating is the tall glass in front of me. It contains two scoops of vanilla ice cream floating in soda water flavored with chocolate syrup.

I'm at Clinton's Soda Fountain in my hometown of Independence, Missouri. It's located on the historic square across from the courthouse, and from the black-and-white tiled floor to the padded bar stools, the place is pure Americana. So is the uniformed, smiling "soda jerk" whose mission is to serve the customers.

The name, which sounds like an insult, is a good description of the job. To operate a soda fountain (the machine that produces carbonated water), the operator has to "jerk" its handles. Manager Julie Swall demonstrates the motion to me, adding carbonated water to cherry syrup.

Soda fountains have been around in the U.S. since the early 19th century. But the height of their popularity was in the 1940s and 50s, when soda jerks started offering not just drinks with bubbles, but hot-fudge sundaes, root-beer floats, and chocolate malts. Confronted by so many possibilities, I choose the simple ice-cream soda. This was my mother's favorite when she was a teen in the 1960s, and I can imagine my grandparents flirting over the same drink a generation earlier.

I take my spoon and re-trieve some smooth ice cream crowned with phosphate bubbles. As the taste of ice cream mixes with the chocolate soda, I close my eyes and savor history. Harry Truman,



**Heavenly:** try an ice-cream soda or a banana split (below)

president of the United States from 1945 to 1953, grew up in Independence. As a teen, he worked his first job here, back when it was a drugstore with a soda fountain in the back.

"Harry would come in in the morning — before he went to school — to wipe down the bottles and sweep the floor," Julie says. "He wasn't actually a soda jerk. He was a cleaning boy." Truman died in 1972, but locals still talk about him today as if he were a good friend. They refer not to "the president" or "Mr. Truman," but to "Harry."

The home where Harry spent more than half his life is less than a mile away, on Delaware Street. When he left the White House in 1953, he returned to Independence with his wife, Bess, and lived on his World War I pension: \$112.56 a month. "People come because they know Harry worked here," Julie says. "He didn't change. He was just a regular guy and an unsung hero in a lot of ways."

The presidential connection isn't the only draw to the soda fountain, though. "People come for the experience," Julie says, "for the 'I remember when.' They're remembering when they used to go to the soda fountain with their grandparents, or their mom said, 'Here's ten cents — go down to the corner and get a soda.'"

I know what she means. Even though I grew up in the 1980s, when a soda cost much more than ten cents, I have great memories of soda fountains. There was a time when choosing between chocolate



and vanilla seemed as monumental as any decision a president could face. Being at Clinton's reminds me of family stories, too. Just after my parents got married, Dad won a ribbon for "making a pig of himself" — that is, finishing a sundae meant for four people. I grew up in awe of this.

Now Julie is making a banana split. She expertly scoops three different flavors of ice cream, lining them up between the halves of a banana.

"You put chocolate syrup over the chocolate ice cream, cherry syrup over the cherry ice cream, and pineapple syrup over the vanilla ice cream," she explains. Next comes a mountain of whipped cream, nuts, more syrup, and a cherry. I'm not surprised when she puts two spoons into the dish. I don't have Dad's championship eating skills. I could never finish one of these on my own.

I continue to drink my soda as people come and go, ordering coffee as well as traditional soda-fountain drinks. Clinton's offers homemade soda pop, in flavors including root beer, vanilla, chocolate, cherry, and orange.



Sweet romance: a couple at a soda fountain in the 1950s

<b>awe</b> [ɔ:]	Ehrfurcht
<b>carbonated</b> ['kɑ:rbəneɪtəd]	mit Kohlensäure versetzt
<b>chocolate malt</b> [tʃɔ:klət 'mɑ:lt]	Milch-Shake mit Eis und Malzmilchpulver
<b>comfort</b> ['kʌmfərt]	Trost
<b>flavor</b> ['fleɪvə]	Geschmack(srichtung)
<b>hot-fudge sundae</b> [ˌhɑ:t fʌdʒ 'sʌndeɪ]	Eisbecher mit heißer Schokoladensöße, Sahne etc.
<b>humid</b> ['hju:mɪd]	feucht, schwül
<b>ice-cream soda</b> [ˌaɪs kri:m 'soudə]	Eiscreme mit Sirup und Wasser
<b>ingredient</b> [ɪn'grɪdiənt]	Zutat
<b>insult</b> ['ɪnsʌlt]	Beleidigung
<b>jerk</b> [dʒɜ:k] <i>ifml.</i>	Wichser; hier: Arschloch; auch: ruckartig bewegen
<b>make a pig of oneself</b> [ˌmeɪk ə 'pɪg əv wʌn, self]	sich tierisch den Bauch vollschlagen
<b>motion</b> ['mɒʃən]	Bewegung
<b>padded</b> ['pædɪd]	gepolstert

Community is another important ingredient here. Back when Harry Truman swept the floor, men would meet to discuss politics in the mornings. During Prohibition in the 1920s, people gathered around soda fountains for socially-acceptable drinks.

Today, retired men meet here for coffee six mornings a week, talking about ways to solve the world's problems.

Julie knows her customers well, and each receives individual attention, from the businesswoman who asks for two shots of espresso in her cappuccino to the man who comes in every afternoon for vanilla ice cream.

"With this economy, people are looking for comfort," Julie says. "We do comfort food — and we give big smiles."



At home in Independence: President Truman and his wife, Bess



Independence, Missouri, is located in the west of the state, close to the border with Kansas. It is part of the Kansas City Metropolitan Area, which, despite the name, is still in Missouri. [www.visitindependence.com](http://www.visitindependence.com)

Clinton's Soda Fountain is located at 100 West Maple Avenue and is open daily except on Sunday; [www.clintonssoda.com](http://www.clintonssoda.com)

To learn more about President Harry S. Truman, visit the Truman Home at 219 North Delaware Street and the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum at 500 W. U.S. Highway 24; [www.trumanlibrary.org](http://www.trumanlibrary.org)

<b>phosphate bubbles</b> ['fɑ:sfet ,bʌbəlz]	von Phosphorsäure erzeugte Bläschen
<b>pineapple</b> ['paɪnæpəl]	Ananas
<b>retrieve</b> [rɪ'tri:v]	wieder herausholen
<b>ribbon</b> ['rɪbən]	Rosette
<b>root-beer float</b> ['ru:t bɪr ,flaʊt] ( <b>root beer</b> )	Eis in Root Beer dunkles, schäumendes Getränk aus verschiedenen Pflanzen)
<b>savor</b> ['seɪvə]	auf der Zunge zergehen lassen, genießen
<b>scoop</b> [sku:p]	(Eis)Kugel
<b>shimmer</b> ['ʃɪmər]	flirren
<b>soda fountain</b> ['soudə ,faʊntən] <i>N. Am.</i>	Café/Bar ohne Schanklizenz
<b>soda pop</b> ['soudə ,pɔ:p] <i>US ifml.</i>	Limonade
<b>sweep</b> [swi:p]	kehren
<b>tiled</b> ['taɪld]	gefliest
<b>unsung</b> [ˌʌn'sʌŋ]	der keine Beachtung fand
<b>whipped cream</b> [wɪpt 'kri:m]	Schlagsahne
<b>wipe down</b> [ˌwaɪp 'daʊn]	abwischen