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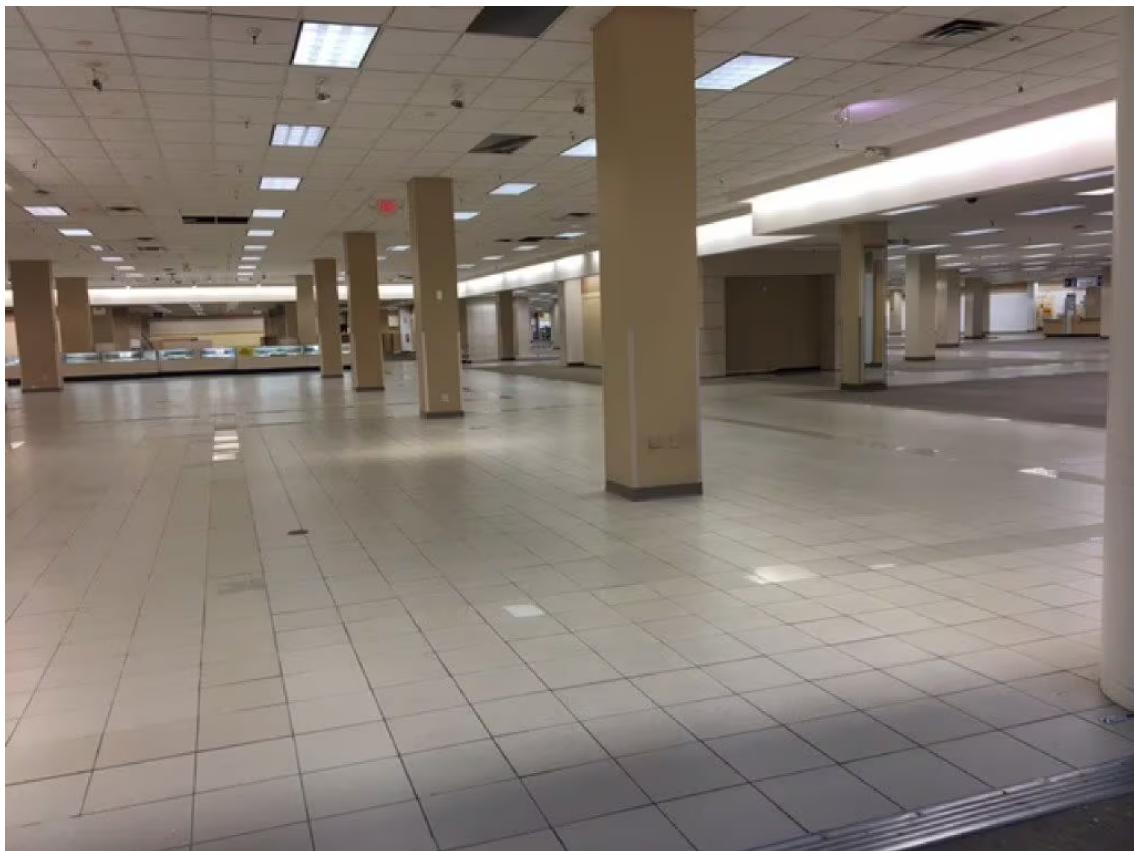
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OPINION

Tour of a dinosaur carcass: A last walk through Valley View Mall

The shopping mall was once the social medium in which all Americans swam. Now they're museums.



The mostly empty Sears store at Valley View a few days before its final closing on July 16. (Jacquielynn Floyd / DMN)

By [Jacquie Lynn Floyd](#)
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The last department store standing at Valley View Mall made its tired exit last week with barely a dying gasp. It was a quiet death.

Sears, of course, has [not exactly been a retail blockbuster](#) for quite a while now. But it was the last rusty stake anchoring what was once the quintessential Dallas mall experience, a familiar mix of mid-level stores catering to a mid-level audience for a universal, if bland, shopping and social experience.

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understandably dismisioned.

Like most Americans, [I hadn't walked through a conventional shopping mall](#) in years. And I hadn't set foot in a Sears store in decades, even though the memory is indelible. When we were kids, my dad rousted us to hit the Sears every weekend, because what child wouldn't rather look at Craftsman tools than watch cartoons on Saturday morning? Just stepping through the door made me itch with boredom.

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Valley View itself has been on life support for years, yet it has fared better than many of its cookie-cutter contemporaries. Its robust location - North Dallas, but not the suburbs - created the incentive for what will be a phoenix-like rebirth, when the property is repurposed as [Dallas Midtown](#), an updated-and-urbanized vision of the mixed-use development.

Even in its waning years, it fared better than countless malls of identical genesis and layout, eking out a few years of afterlife as an artists' cooperative.

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Last week, though, it was just another dead mall, another dinosaur carcass. It had the gloomy feel of a lost civilization, like the movie set from the original *Planet of the Apes*. I was Charlton Heston.



Final days of Sears, the last remaining anchor at Valley View Mall, July 12. (Jacquielynn Floyd / DMN)

The first indoor, climate controlled shopping center I ever saw was [Highland Mall in Austin](#), which opened in 1971. A neighbor lady loaded up all the kids on our rural road in her station wagon and drove us out to see what all the fuss was about.

I was smitten. It was huge and beautiful and new, all its delights hidden inside, like a titanic Easter egg. It was the dull, dingy, heat-baked shopping districts of my childhood turned outside-in, a theme-park streetscape like a game board resized for pedestrians. For an American girl child on the threshold of adolescence, it was paradise.

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It was the social medium in which I grew up. The mall stayed pretty much exactly the same as I, along with my contemporaries, eagerly previewed teenager-hood. The same department stores, food courts, youth-friendly retail shops bursting with junk and jetsam — the formula was reenacted in every city, every suburb with comforting predictability. I roamed the mall with packs of girlfriends for a few years, until I graduated to boys and head shops and warehouse-sized record stores.

The mall didn't change. Weary old Highland Mall grew stale and dingy over the years, until it was reincarnated a few years ago as a satellite community college campus.

Malls died a long and painful death precisely because of their wasteful ubiquity; no species so prolific could be wiped out overnight. The mall was everywhere, as boring and outdated as the rumpus room in your parents' basement. Americans grew cynical about the notion of recreational shopping (although it did, and still does, occupy much of our attention).

In all honesty, it had been so long since I visited a mall that touring Valley View's skeletal remains was a nostalgic novelty. Viewed from the floor above, the abandoned food court was littered with debris, the trophy-sized tropical plants dead from lack of water.



Abandoned food court with dead plants at Valley View Mall, July 12. (Jacquie Lynn Floyd / DMN)

I could see the ghost of my teenage self there, snickering with friends over Styrofoam plates of sticky lo mein, showing off our hideous purchases — tacky blouses, evil-smelling perfume, cheap

costume jewelry. Oh, to be young, your babysitting earnings burning a hole in your bell-bottomed Levis.

Valley View was full of such ghosts, but not much else. Most of the storefronts were empty anonymous spaces, fenced off behind pull-down gates. A few showed the heroic efforts of re-purpose schemes: Art galleries, craft shops, an odd World War II exhibit.

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The latter consisted almost entirely of mannequins dressed in authentic uniforms of both the Allied and Axis powers standing in a crowded space that used to house a sporting goods store, a macabre gathering of enemies. The chain-link gate gave it the feel of a POW camp scene. A Luftwaffe officer cradled his own head beneath one arm: A joke?



One of the last few years' efforts to re-purpose Valley View Mall, a privately owned World War II exhibit. Last week, it was a fenced-off collection of uniformed mannequins, including a Luftwaffe officer cradling his head under one arm. (Jacquielynn Floyd / DMN)

I am as soppy and nostalgic as the next person; probably more so than most. It hurts to see architectural milestones from my own lifetime knocked down and reincarnated with the dinosaur carcasses of the future: Starbucks, Apple stores, pseudo-minimalist bars and restaurants with "craft" in their names.

But few institutions overstayed their welcome like the shopping mall. Our compulsive interest with what lay within them was dulled by repetition, and replaced by the dawning sense that what lay without — blank walls and acres of naked parking lot — was (and remains) a blight on the landscape.

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Odd socks and underpants were among the last bits of remaining merchandise during the final days at the Valley View Sears, which closed July 16. (Jacquie Lynn Floyd / DMN)

So: Bye-bye, Valley View. There's not much left now, apart from the movie theater, which Midtown developers say will close by year's end.

At least [something new will grow in its place](#), something interesting.

But what in the world are we going to do with all those other malls?



[Jacquie Lynn Floyd](#). Jacquie Lynn Floyd is a metro columnist and editorial writer for the Dallas Morning News. She has been a columnist since 1999, and last year was also named to the newspaper's editorial board. A native of Austin, Texas, she attended George Mason University. During a journalism career that spans 35 years, Floyd has worked for a variety of Texas newspapers.

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