



Mid-1980s File Photo

TIME GOES BY: This green-and-yellow sign beckoned diners to Al Green's drive-in for decades. Green died this week at 77.

Indy's drive-in king leaves a generation remembering when

John Shaughnessy



As soon as we heard the news, Al, the stories and the memories started flowing again — just like in the old days.

One of my favorite stories was the time you approached an older couple kissing in a car, steaming up the windows in one of the parking spots outside your drive-in restaurant. It had been years since smiling young girls in Eisenhower jackets and pillbox hats had roller-skated to a car window there, asking customers in souped-up Chevys what they wanted to order.

You asked the couple if you could help them, although it seemed pretty clear they were doing all right without you, Al. That's when they told you it was their wedding anniversary, that they came here every year on this day — parking in the same spot, holding hands and kissing, just as they had done when they were teen-agers.

When they told you they had been married 39 years, you wished them many more, Al, and then you went back inside your restaurant.

The wonder years

Like youth and young love, there was a time when we thought Al Green's would live forever, Al. And you would, too.

So when we heard the news that you died Wednesday at 77, another part of the city's past — and our past — died, too.

Back in the '50s and '60s, teens flocked to your place at 7101 E. Washington St. Your huge green-



Al Green ran his East Washington Street drive-in restaurant for nearly 40 years, delivering not-so-fast food — and lots of it.

and-yellow sign served as a beacon, twinkling lights spelling out "Al Green's" with the words "Famous Food" just beneath them.

Sometimes, people came to to your neon-pink drive-in to savor the gargantuan portions of fries, burgers, shrimp and breaded tenderloins that you called "half a hog on a bun."

Sometimes they came with no money in their pockets, knowing you still would let them hang out with their friends, or curl up in the front seat with their date to watch the free, second-run movies you showed on an outdoor screen.

OK, Al, you and I both know the kids in those cars sometimes found other things to do than watch the movie. But it

was all part of growing up, all part of a time when our lives seemed so wondrous, so painful, so intense, so alive.

A time to remember

You remember how everything changed in the '70s and '80s, Al?

Elvis and Chuck Berry gave way to *Disco Duck* and Boy George singing *It's a Miracle*. Hell, Al, back in the '50s, it would have been a miracle if Boy George's mother would have let him go outside dressed like that.

But even though the world changed, your guarantee stayed the same as when you first opened the drive-in in 1947: "Same Day Service."

First-timers often laughed at that motto, but in the '70s and '80s it often was true. The crowds at your place had dwindled by then, and you and your sister, Belle, were more interested in visiting with the old friends that stopped by than serving them.

A familiar face could wait two or three hours for a burger, fries and root beer — giving Belle just enough time to catch up on the news about someone's family, information she later could recall in an instant even if it was a few years before she saw the person again.

I hope you know how much she misses you already, Al.

Others do, too. No matter how much time has gone by, passing by your place is like seeing a first love after a number of years. She doesn't look as good as you remember, but when you see her eyes and hear her talk . . . well, it's just nice to remember, Al.

Those times were special. So were you.