

The Write Place At the Write Time

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Come in...and be captivated...

"Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.



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GROWING UP TOWNVIEW

By: Joann Cantrell

The farmer who was our neighbor for more than 25 years would roll over in his grave if he could see what became of his 20-acre spread. That's what all of the neighbors said about him. He'd shake his head in disbelief.

Past and present residents of my neighborhood in suburban Pittsburgh and those who were raised on our beloved Townview Street during his reign as patriarch and guardian would understand. We were the fortunate ones who watched his daily toil on the farm as he rode the fields that served as the border of our neighborhood. The rhythmic ticking of his plow as it tilled the soil was a constant metronome, keeping the simple, slow-paced beat of the routine of our lives.

To paint a better picture, if you wander down the winding curves, past the Y where Wetzel and Wible Roads weave together, you'll find our street right before you grow tired of the tongue twisting W's. Appropriately named for the once-scenic view of the city that was displayed at the cul-de-sac's finish, Townview Street is so narrow, that two cars can barely fit side by side to pass. Frequent drivers often have to extend the courtesy known to longtime residents of backing up to let another car pass through. The Z-shaped street is flat and served as a perfect test ground to learn to ride a bike, unlike the other neighboring streets with their steep, descending hills.

Originally, there were 14 identical Cape Cod homes on Townview Street, seven on each side, offering affordable living in the suburbs only 7 miles from the city of Pittsburgh. As young families grew, small dormers and extensions were added to some of the homes, but for the most part, the original blueprints have remained intact for more than 50 years.

At one time, Townview Street was comprised of a multigenerational mix of neighbors who coexisted with a keen sense of awareness to each other's needs. Retired seniors, middle-aged empty-nesters and young couples in their 20's and 30's who were beginning to raise families blended together and thought nothing of lending or borrowing, or keeping watch on each other long before it was a formalized concept.

When I was growing up, our house had an old skeleton key to our back door and coincidentally, the neighbors down the street had an identical key that fit the back door of their home. It was never a worry to accidentally be locked out of the house, because most of the time, that neighbor was always home and eager to come to the rescue with the interchangeable key that fit our door. There was a trusting camaraderie between neighbors and the fear of theft was never considered. Families intimately knew each other and shared what they could, be it free babysitting, a ride to work, a meal for a sick neighbor or contributing flowers and food for the unfortunate circumstance if a neighbor had a funeral in the family.

The children who grew up on Townview Street were categorized into the big kids, the little kids, and the boys, and our days were occupied with simple routines and projects. Not so very long ago, the dads took the only family car and went to work each day while the moms stayed home with the abundance of children that spilled from one yard to another to play with each other. Kids ambitiously entertained themselves on long summer days with excursions to another local farm to buy 13 ears of fresh grown corn for a dollar, and often walked a few miles to and from the nearby township swimming pool, sometimes twice a day. We played in the woods and fields that bordered our lots and at night, stayed out until long after dark and enjoyed ice cream sandwiches on waffles made from scratch as a special treat for all the kids from the neighbor who lived at the end of the cul-de-sac. At least once a week in the summer, we camped out in make-shift tents and sleeping bags in our backyards and listened to Top 40 songs on our transistor radios until the middle of the night with the comfort of knowing that our homes were always left unlocked all night long should we need anything.

Fourth of July block parties at the end of the cul-de-sac were a summertime highlight, as was the annual planning and preparation of backyard carnivals to benefit muscular dystrophy, rotating each year with a different host family. The informal social event prompted the participation of every neighbor, whether it was donating homemade baked goods or prizes, helping to set up carnival booths or merely attending and supporting the two-day fundraiser organized by children.

Almost mythical, the simplicity of life on Townview Street and the close

connection with neighbors provided everything our hearts desired.

There's quite a different landscape now. The metronome that kept the pace of the neighborhood has been silenced. The inevitable end of the farmer's life was the dreaded preface to an expansive housing development that was forecasted for decades. A vast maze of new homes have overtaken the acres of the farm and have increased the number of neighbors. Ironically, the camaraderie that was once as natural as a summer breeze has all but vanished. The street is empty now as new children are playing somewhere else while parents are away from their homes working. Today, neighbors only recognize each other by the type of vehicle they drive and barely acknowledge one another with a passing wave.

The 14 original houses are still there as a touchstone of Townview Street with its comfort and coziness, serving as a constant reminder of what it was like to know and trust one another and truly be a good neighbor during a time that many would gladly return to.

SPIRITUAL EMERGENCY

By: Denise Bouchard

I picked my daughter up at school on one of those cool rainy days during an endlessly long and gray spring season.

"What's wrong, mom?" she said. "You seem down today."

In spite of being the mom that everyone was able to turn to, in spite of baked brownies, constant parties, rides home and sleepovers, betrayal was a constant life-like intruder in our lives. Dressed all in black, this intruder found his way into what we thought were the safe houses of our friendships. There were no signs of forced entry, little evidence and a only few witnesses left behind, but the damage was done and the friendships were forever stolen away.

My husband, daughter and I felt the fit of the community becoming smaller and

smaller.

I hadn't been there in years and I remembered thinking that if I could just find the area hospital, I'd be able to locate the shrine.

In truly serendipitous fashion, at that moment an ambulance ended up in front of us. Its lights weren't on, so I figured it was headed toward the hospital and took a gamble by following its general direction.

When we arrived at the shrine, it felt so peaceful just walking its well landscaped paths. But I was strongly compelled towards the chapel.

We walked into the inner lobby as a priest was walking past in a procession into the chapel signaling that a mass would now be taking place.

Not being an overtly religious person, I didn't know that I felt like sitting through a mass. I had just wanted to come in and maybe say a prayer or simply think about things. Yet somehow my daughter and I found ourselves entering and finding a seat well hidden in the back which was my way of being able to escape if things got too uncomfortable.

Was it my imagination, or did the priest seem to be looking directly at me from the moment when we all stood at the beginning of the mass?

The heavy set priest had a very kind face which put me at ease and thus he began his homily. The homily about Lydia.

In ancient Jerusalem, there lived a woman named Lydia and her profession was dying fabric. She and her family were known for the production of purple dye which was very rare. This ability allowed her to have a lovely home in which she often entertained guests.

One day, Jesus found her distraught, crying quietly to herself, and he asked why she was troubled. She tearfully related her story to him.

My mind swirled with disbelief as I heard the priest describing my very own life's then current situation.

Jesus told Lydia to keep her heart open, that her friendships were not all in vain and that new friends would be entering her life. These individuals would be like-minded and would need and appreciate her safe and loving home, a haven of comfort, laughter, and abundant food.

I sat entranced by the priest's words delivered in his peaceful and simple manner. I was amazed that I was hearing the exact words that I needed to hear at that moment and they couldn't have been any more appropriate if God had come and spoken to me Himself.

The words were like an embrace and they enfolded me as surely as the purple fabric of the sweater I was wearing and I realized why the priest had looked over at me.

I went home and vowed to keep my heart open even in that time of profound chaos and shortly thereafter, we finally sold our house.

We moved to a beautiful new home in the country during the autumn.

That next spring, bright purple perennial bushes bloomed in front of the house.

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