

## **Memories of Montgomery Place:**

Growing up in the 50s and 60s

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Growing up in Montgomery Place in the 1950s and 60s was a unique experience, although it took many years for us to appreciate just how lucky we had been. At the time, it was just the way it was – didn't everyone grow up in this idyllic "Leave It to Beaver" world? No – I guess not – but we didn't know that back then.

People made jokes about us living out in the country, but really the joke was on them. We had all the benefits of a small town lifestyle, with ready access to the amenities of the city, although it did take a while before bus service actually came into Montgomery. Before that, people had to walk to the Intercontinental Packers to catch the bus. Many neighbours kept chickens, turkeys and even ducks and rabbits in their back yards – I recall finding a young turkey on our lawn one day which I picked up and returned to our neighbours with the question "Is this your turkey?", as if it could have come from anywhere else!

There were no sidewalks then, just as there are no sidewalks now, and let's hope it always stays that way. It seemed that it was always on the last day of school - when we went to pick up our report cards - that the City decided to tar the streets, thus creating the perfect conditions for a few new smudges on our white and navy Saddle Oxfords.

In the early days in Montgomery, we even had milk delivery by horse and wagon and, after horses were retired, by the milkman who called the lady of the house "ma'am" as he brought glass bottles of milk to the back door. I remember asking Mom why the milkman always called her "man" because, of course, she wasn't one. And nascent gender equity was in evidence back then as we had mail delivery to the house by Mrs. Thompson, our "mail lady".

As children, we probably had the most freedom of any generation since. Out with our friends, we never seemed to run out of things to do as we roamed the countryside in and around Montgomery Place. We'd come home for lunch and then we were off again until suppertime. At night, the end of the day was signalled by the sounds of Moms calling in their respective broods.

In the spring, there was always a slough at "the bluff" on the intersection of Caen Street and Crescent Boulevard. We'd venture carefully out onto the ice, testing just how far we could go, and later, as the ice melted, we would build rafts. Inevitably our fun resulted in a "bootful" so we'd head home to face the wrath of our Moms.

In the summertime, we were outdoors from morning until night, always up for new adventures. We'd be out picking crocuses in the field by the Government Elevators or picking bottles in the

ditches where we might collect the magnificent sum of 50 cents! On our bikes, we were completely mobile and there was a communications network that served us well in the absence of the internet and social media apps. When a delivery truck dropped part of its load in the ditch across from Riddell's Store, everyone converged for miles, even if the candy they managed to find had already been flattened by a passing car or truck.

There was always something going on at the Paddling Pool Playground which was a magnet for all Montgomery kids. Craft classes, sand building competitions, dog shows, bike decorating, soap box derby – you name it – the summer counsellors, who were only a few years older than us, made sure that everyone was safe and having a good time on those hot summer days. And when we really wanted to cool off, we'd take the bus to the Avenue H (aka Riversdale) Pool where we'd swim all day, sometimes taking a break to watch the older kids jiving on the cement pad adjacent to the expanse of lawn.

The ball diamond was also a big draw – someone would bring a bat and ball, everyone had their own glove, and before you knew it, there was a scrub game in progress – certainly nothing organized and there were no parents to be found. We played in the schoolyard; we played in the back yard – wherever there was a gathering, some sort of game would emerge.

The half-acre lots granted to returning Second World War veterans meant that we had large yards with expanses of green lawns and huge gardens. There was room to run and jump, do cartwheels and summersaults, run through the sprinkler in our bathing suits, play Hide & Seek, Anti-I-Over and Mother May I, or a family game of croquet or Jarts.

But the lush yards that we remember as children did not just magically appear. There is a picture of Dad standing in front of our brand new house, with nothing but prairie and piles of dirt around him. All those trees and beautiful lawns came as the result of much hard work as our parents struggled to give us the childhood we inherited.

I remember Dad coming home from work, immediately getting into his work clothes and, after a supper that always consisted of a multitude of fresh vegetables, heading out to the garden where he worked until dusk. There was always a garden plot for the kids where we carefully measured the rows, and planted lettuce, radishes, carrots and peas.

Mom was in charge of the gathering and processing of this bounty which meant that our days included much-protested stints of picking and shelling peas, topping and tailing beans and husking corn, picking raspberries and strawberries and of course, the dreaded weeding, not to mention the unending task of picking dandelions from the front lawn. I can still smell the redolent fragrance of the sweet peas which were planted against a wire trellis next to the raspberry patch, and taste the cucumbers dipped in the sugar bowl that were a special treat.

In the winter months, it was the skating rink that was the main attraction. When the temperatures dipped, we'd listen for the music – if the strains of "Sentimental Journey" or some other tune from that era drifted up the street, we'd know that the rink shack would be

open. Regardless of the temperature, no one went home until the lights went out and the music stopped; then we'd walk home, gazing up at the infinite blackness of the crisp night skies and trying to name the constellations.

Hallowe'en night saw the streets of Montgomery Place filled with witches, ghosts and goblins carrying their pillowcases, again with nary a parent in sight. Kids collected home-made treats and apples, with no fear of tampering. And I'm sure the bus drivers of the time will recall that barricade that kept appearing each time they made the trip up and down Lancaster Boulevard!

Those of us at the early end of the baby-boom generation started our school lives at King George School until Montgomery School could be built. I have recollections of taking the bus to King George for Kindergarten and Grade 1 and on one occasion a few of us decided to walk home, creating much panic amongst our parents who picked us up just as we reached the Intercontinental Packers.

Montgomery School was central to our lives – Christmas concerts, field days, end of year excursions to Leisure Land or Pike Lake (remember the dreaded Pike Lake "itch"?), Valentine's Day boxes and Hallowe'en parties, school dances and graduation exercises. On those hot June days when no one felt like working, the windows would be open and one year, we were delighted by a pet magpie who would jump in the window and hop around our desks amidst much hilarity. One standout moment in my school career was in Grade 7 when Mr. Hibbert created a volcano by pouring sulphuric acid into sugar, all the while pretending that he had no idea of the reaction that would be created.

Through a multitude of such experiences, neighbourhood bonds were formed and were lasting. Shared memories were made through such simple pleasures as piling onto a hammock together, munching on crab-apples or daring each other to eat chokecherries, observing the transformation of tadpoles into frogs in a tub in the backyard, picking Saskatoon berries into plastic buckets after fighting through swarms of grasshoppers, and sleeping in tents on warm summer nights.

I believe it is significant that so many Montgomery "kids" have moved back home to Montgomery Place to raise their own families. I believe that the motivation is more than just the large yards, lush greenery and peaceful tranquility. There is a shared solidarity that came with being the children of World War II veterans ... a collective consciousness that our parents had been a part of something important ... that we were here because they had faced fear and made sacrifices in order to make the world and Canada a safer place. They never talked about it much, but we knew that their legacy was the lifestyle we all enjoyed. And for that, we were proud. We were the "Montgomery kids"!