

Growing Up in Montgomery Place, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Leslee Newman – 3303 Caen Street



Leslee Newman, 1958



Greg, Leslee, Larry, Dale Newman, 1958.

I miss the song of meadowlarks in the tall prairie grass outside our door.

When my parents – Bernie and Evelyn Newman – built a house and moved our family to Montgomery Place in 1956, I was six years old. The wild spaces on the edge of the city were all I knew, all any of us in the post-war tribe of kids growing up in Montgomery Place knew. Now we're labelled the Baby Boomers, derided for the societal bulge we pushed through with each coming of age – building more schools, claiming more jobs, consuming more health care benefits.

But then, growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, our world was a magical place of discovery, friendship, laughter, and safety. We respected our own parents and all the parents up and down the block. Discipline was a community affair. Bikes were our escape into endless hours of fun – building forts, fishing for tadpoles, rafting in sloughs, catching bugs in glass jars, chasing gophers, searching for birds' nests, examining footprints left behind by some unseen four-footed visitor, and in one special summer, digging up the bones of some long-dead horse that had been buried in the park bush. My Dad became a patient forensic archaeologist the summer I discovered the first bone. It's little wonder that when I headed off to

the University of Saskatchewan that I took a degree in Archaeology and Anthropology.

I got my first (and only) bike when I was nine or 10 years old. It was second-hand, balloon-tired, full-sized bike. I balanced on the pedals for years until I grew to reach the seat. There were no training wheels in those days, just my Dad holding onto the seat and running behind me down the gravel road until he judged I'd gained a sense of confidence and balance. My older brother Greg also had a big old balloon-tired bike, with a metal carrier on the front. He'd load a cardboard box into the carrier and head west along the highway – collecting bottles. Those were the days when drinkers who drove simply tossed each bottle out the window as it was finished. Greg made good pocket money on his excursions.

When we wanted city things to do, all the kids on the block gathered together to open a backyard café, to assemble a parade, or to play a game of ball. I remember one magical evening every summer when Mom would spread newspaper over the concrete step and, in our pyjamas, we'd sit and watch the fireworks radiating from the Exhibition grounds across the river.

We were always on the go – running, jumping, skipping, biking, climbing – wandering the prairie near and far. On adventurous days, our Moms would pack lunches and we'd hop onto our bikes for a ride straight south on the low road to Pike Lake. The road that we now call Elevator Road was a gravel road that went straight south to present-day Valley Road, before the CN yards interrupted it in 1964. We'd fly down the hill past Mah Hon Gardens, pedalling hard until we reached the bend in the road where the Berry Barn sits today. I never made it to Pike Lake, but I wouldn't be surprised to hear that others did. We'd eat our lunch in the tall grass, never worrying about ticks which had not yet made their way this far north, then make the trek home again, often walking our bikes up the hill that we'd had so much fun riding down.

Sometimes we'd head for the river through the dump road. The landfill, against the protest of Montgomery Place parents, had been located in our hip pocket to

the southeast in 1955, the same year that Montgomery Place was amalgamated into the City of Saskatoon. For us, the ride through the dump was a ride through a valley, unlike today, when the valley has been filled and a mountain of garbage has grown. At the top of the valley, we'd take a big breath then pedal as hard as we could, trying to hold our breath until we reached the other side - in a vain attempt to resist breathing the foul air. Playing on the riverbank at the foot of the train bridge gave us hours of fort-building and make-believe fun. Mom had grown up close to river and had not thought twice about letting us play there. It was not until the murder of Alexandra Wiwcharuk in May 1962 that caution and fear crept into our childhood play on the riverbank.

I grew up with three brothers whose memories undoubtedly differ from mine. A self-confessed bookworm, the day the Saskatoon Public Library brought the bookmobile to Montgomery Place was a red letter day for me. Not so for my brothers who regarded time with your nose in a book as time away from friends, sports and the outdoors. Sedentary pastimes were not for my brothers. Even when we got our first black and white television, no one watched during the day. Sunday evening with Bonanza and the Ed Sullivan Show was the only time the set drew the whole family into the living room.

I was enrolled in the first Grade 1 class in Montgomery School, part of the first class to go through all eight grades at Montgomery. Mrs. Fast was the Grade 1 teacher who lived at 3204 Ortona Street, who taught decades of Montgomery Place six-year-olds. The mudroom doors were on the north side of the school. Girls entered through the red door; boys through the blue door. Once inside, we filed down the hall to our classes, in a single-file line along the east wall for the girls and along the west wall for the boys. Later, I remember an air raid siren atop the school and the fear percolating through adult conversations during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

I remember going to Sunday School in Montgomery School, a large group of girls sandwiched into the janitor's room with Mrs. Nein leading the lesson. We had a Bible verse to memorize each Sunday, a fact that seemed to put my brothers off

church forever. When Trinity Church was built in 1963, the church basement soon became home to weekend Hi-C coffee houses.

When we reached high school age, Teen Club dances in the Montgomery School gym drew teenagers from far and wide, with long-suffering parent volunteers chaperoning and hoping to ensure there was good clean fun, not mischief and mayhem. Most of us went to Mount Royal Collegiate and friends we made there all wanted to join the Montgomery kids for Teen Club dances.

Mount Royal was a brand new high school in 1960. Many Montgomery kids were among the first classes that year. There was a special bus that collected the Montgomery students, taking them directly to school and home again in the afternoon. Those busses were crammed from floor to ceiling. Kids with cars were not as commonplace then as today.

We all rode the bus, not only to school but whenever we went downtown. Who remembers the No.3 bus travelling south down Avenue K to turn in the loop at the Sanatorium?

Our parents and their spirits of community support and volunteering were the bedrock of our growing up years in Montgomery Place, although we didn't recognize it at the time. For years, my Dad looked after the ball diamond in the summer and the rink in the winter. Mosquitos plagued us as we cheered on winning Montgomery teams on the ball diamond. Classical music called us to skate on clear and cold winter evenings.

My family was sporty and I was the anomaly. "Keep your eye on the ball, Les," I remember my Dad coaxing. My brothers all loved sports. Dad grew up in a family that skated, played ball, golfed, played tennis. In Mom's family, the Shaws were sporty; indeed, her Mom and Dad had met on a ball team. Mom's mother was the only girl of four boys in the Rivett family; the boys regularly appeared in Star-Phoenix coverage of games during the teens and twenties. Then there was me. It wasn't until Grade 3 that my teacher said, "I think Leslee needs glasses," and a

whole new world opened up to me. Little did Dad know that I couldn't keep my eye on the ball because I couldn't see it until it was upon me.

When we were old enough to look for work, Intercon beckoned many of us. Since 1946 Fred Mendel had always supported the young families of Montgomery Place. Many Montgomery dads worked there. Mr. Mendel made it policy to hire the children of Montgomery Place plant workers for summer work, or to hire Montgomery kids in general. Thanks to that policy, I sailed through University without debt. I began work there the summer I turned 16 and continued every summer until I was 21 years old. Tying on a kerchief under my hardhat, donning the prerequisite rubber boots and smock, I was introduced to a different world – more rough around the edges than what I was used to at home.

Growing up in Montgomery Place shaped me in ways that I took for granted. My parents, indeed most of our friends and neighbours, modelled the lives that they wished for their children. Be kind and honest. Show respect. Value peace. Work hard. Play fair. Keep fit. Volunteer. Finish what you start. Be moderate in all things. Accept responsibility. Have faith. Learn from your mistakes. Live the Golden Rule and treat others as you wish to be treated.



Visitor from England – The Newman family gathered in the backyard of 3303 Caen Street in 1960.

*Left to right: Bernie Newman with Dale in front, Larry, Evelyn with Greg in front,
Grandma Gertude Newman, Leslee, Gertrude's sister - Aunt Lil from England.*