

I Believe in Hope

I believe in the power of community and the endurance of friendship. Connections are developed with small interactions, and in response to common needs. My neighborhood has a community connection that my family and I have enjoyed for over 23 years. We were the new family on the block when we moved here in 1988. Our house was known by the name of the family who had built it in the mid 1950's. It has taken all of these years for people to refer to the house by our last name. We are now part of the fabric of this little neighborhood which was once solely populated with modest ranch style homes.

One of my dearest friends is someone living up the street who I had pregnancy in common with in 1988. She and I had our children six weeks apart and later they attended day care together in my basement. I still remember looking out of my kitchen window and seeing my neighbor for the first time as she and her husband walked the quiet neighborhood street waiting for the arrival of their child. That seems like a lifetime ago. The babies we expected then are now 23 years old, the next generation, and friends themselves.

Another of my neighbors has a near obsession with gardening. I have a sunny spot in my side yard that once grew prolific weeds. A few years ago I offered the idea of a community garden space to this industrious neighbor, and she eagerly led the campaign to beautify that little bit of real estate. Now, my side yard is a showcase of blooming rose bushes, daring dahlias, climbing clematis, and vigorous vegetables. Molly plants tomatoes, Steve plants nasturtiums, Will planted strawberries this year, and Susan plants and tends the abundant cut flower collection. I provide the irrigation and an occasional smattering of annuals. If I were less trusting, I might worry about an adverse possession claim, but this bit of dirt gives us all a place to gather and talk in the spring, summer, and fall. Susan donated two pea-green plastic Adirondack chairs to the garden this year to give neighbors a place to sit and have coffee together on sunny mornings. Our biggest challenge these days is keeping the deer from eating the rose blossoms.

Our neighborhood association has set its sights high. It formed a non-profit a few years ago to provide stewardship for a 52-acre city park that was saved from development through a city charter by a prior generation of committed neighbors. The neighborhood association worked with the city a few years back to develop a paved neighborhood pathway for pedestrians which runs along a main road, and along the edge of our city park. Most recently, neighbors petitioned the city to landscape a little triangle of utility easement space which had a power pole and weeds as the center points of interest. The neighbors negotiated with the city to provide grading services and irrigation. Plants and muscle were donated, and a petite neighborhood park was born. Neighbors still provide annual maintenance and upkeep, and the city installed two park benches and gravel for a garden path.

Being a community mediator, I appreciate the value my neighborhood places on building community and supportive relationships. We have had our share of change, which can easily breed contentious debate, stereotyping and division. Change visits our neighborhood in the form of remodeling (McMansions replace modest ranch style homes), cutting of trees for development of once forested lots, old friends moving and new people moving in. When these issues arise, there is the usual exchange of phone calls and worrying, and serious discussions in the street. Letters are written and

input provided to decision makers at the city. The process is typically civil and respectful. New neighbors are welcomed with open arms, and departing neighbors are missed.

Originally our now outdated and illegal CC&R's prohibited people of certain races, religions, or color to live in the then newly-developed residential neighborhood. In my nearly quarter of a century here, I am happy to say that we have enjoyed a wide diversity of race, religion, color, opinion (political and otherwise), orientation, marital status, age, physical ability, mental ability, school affiliation, social status, preferences of household animals, gardening abilities, types of automobiles and other transportation...I could go on.

I love my neighborhood and I love my neighbors. They know my family, and they are part of my family. I feel privileged to have these connections and friendships, and I look forward to living here long enough to see the future changes, like the elder neighbors who have gone before me. I am enjoying similar connections and relationships in my experience as an OMA member. Regardless of where you live or how often you move, I hope you are part of a community that you feel connected to over time. Enjoy the small interactions and a lifetime of relationships. Let those relationships bloom in your OMA experiences.