

Barland Street in the 1940's and beyond...

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submitted by Constance Iverson

Reading the Fall 2003 edition of the Eastside Hill News with the "articles to share" request, I began exploring memories of my life on the Eastside Hill. I had no idea it would become a process of discovery and unexpected surprises. I found, all but forgotten, some of the sweetest, touching recollections of family, friends and neighbors, and felt moved by the experiences and inspired to submit this article with a collection of my own memories.

My mother, Jean B. Rolland Sires, an Eastside girl herself, and my Father, Leland G. Sires, lived at 10371/2 Barland Street the June 1938 morning I was born. My sister Carol was eleven months my senior and she and I had the time of our lives growing without benefit of television, video games and the like. There was no mechanical equipment to act as a barrier to our imaginations creating fun. I look back with an enormous sense of delight.

Barland Street in the 1940's resembled most streets in our city, yet not, as most families were young, had 2+ children, few had telephones, fewer still had cars. Looking up and down our street, therefore, you were likely to discover children at play, roller-skating, jumping rope, playing ball, hide and seek, kick the can and during a rainstorm running and splashing rainwater at each other with the spontaneity that came so naturally during childhood.

May 1st... one of the simplest and happiest occasions found the neighborhood children gathered around their own kitchen table waiting for dusk so they could distribute the "May Baskets" they had made just hours before. Paper cups with pipe cleaner handles made especially beautiful with the addition of buttons, lace or ribbons held a few precious sweets designed to let a friend know they were special. We were required to get the basket to our friend's door, unseen, ring the doorbell and run like the dickens. Looking back I realize how much those baskets meant to me, and what it was about them that touched me so. I'm told the practice no longer exists... how sad.

The houses on Barland Street were as diverse and individual as the families that lived in them. Most seniors sat on porch swings, or chairs in the evening to escape the summer days heat and to engage in conversations with all who passed. My sister Carol and I, pennies in hand, waited in anticipation as the bell from the Ice Cream Cart came ever nearer. All our lives touched and intertwined on a regular basis and most of us grew up and spent our lives in the same community as family and friends.

Sadly, 10371/2 Barland Street no longer exists. The now remodeled single-family house bears no resemblance to the one of my youth. Gone is the large, white front porch and with it the echoes of long forgotten conversation. Now, too, only a memory is the old Coal Shed in the backyard, with it's dark corners where Carol and I would hide from Mother to sneak a forbidden smoke. That back yard also had two plum, and two apple trees that I could never resist climbing. Recalling all of this uncorks the memory of Carol dashing upstairs to breathlessly tell mother to "come quick, Connie is hanging by her underpants from a limb of our apple tree!" Mother ran, ladder in hand, to the rescue. Awkward,

uncomfortable situations like these make me smile today and did not, by the way, prevent me from climbing those trees. To this day I count apples and plums among my favorite snacks.

Noticeably absent from the Barland Street skyline is the Bethel Baptist Church steeple foretelling of the nurturing comfort to be found inside her walls. Absent now, too, from the street of my youth are the large cement curbsides, horseblocks with post and ring... where neighborhood children would gather to meet the ice wagon. Big looming smiles from the Ice Man as he chipped a piece of ice for each child knowing they would be crushed if forgotten. Realizations like these trigger ideas for what I wish to write... the underlying significance of each memory plays a role in the decision. My memory of our neighborhood doctor, Dr. John Lowe, who took the time to know each and every patient, by name, and who day or night made house calls. His involvement went beyond simple politeness or courtesy... we all knew he cared about our welfare, and we loved and trusted him.

The war affected our lives on a daily basis. Almost everything we purchased required a given number of ration stamps. Sugar, butter, meat and eggs. Items that are basic staples today were all too often absent in my parents kitchen. All households did their part for the war effort. The all had root cellars to store produce for the winter and grew Victory Gardens, preserved fruit and vegetables... saved strings, tinfoil, newspaper and tin cans.

We had one business on our street. A neighbor, John Vesperman, set up sewing machines in his garage in the late 1940's and "Chippewa Valley Sporting Goods" was born. My Mother worked for Mr. Vesperman for years. She began on Barland Street making chenille letters on one of those machines in his garage. The letters created were sewn on various schools "Letter Sweaters." The business moved in the 50's to Farwell Street, I believe, and finally to Hastings Way, and has evolved to sell sporting equipment, no longer involved in the business of lettering.

The best intentions run amok and so I close this article, awaiting another occasion to write, to recognize friendships past and present and acknowledge tender moments that might ordinarily slip away.