

5726 Morningside

We moved to 5726 Morningside when I was six. At the time it was the next-to-the-last street in northeast Dallas. It must have been a nearly ideal location for a child to play and explore life. Most of the families on the block were young, with young children ranging in age from toddlers to a couple of young teens. The neighborhood was quiet enough that we were able to play and live with a minimum of interference from adults.

The terrain was flat, with the sidewalk running in uninterrupted fashion from busy Greenville Avenue to Matilda Street, with its streetcar track that also served the Dallas-McKinney interurban. Visually, the block on our side was divided in the middle by a two-story house with a big hackberry tree. Our house was next door to that tree, to the east. Our location was ideal in the summertime, for our front yard was the first to be shaded and cool. Consequently, after naps, baths, and clean play clothes, most of the kids gathered in our yard to play quiet games like "May I" until time for supper. As each of us saw the appropriate father appear in his car or walking from the streetcar, we would disappear into our own homes.



One summer we spent several afternoons planning a neighborhood play. I had come home from the library with a book of plays suitable for an assortment of ages. Choosing the play took a great deal of time, but we finally settled on a one-act play with a fairly large cast to include as many of us as possible. The casting was a remarkably amiable achievement, and we began choosing our roles and rehearsing the play, simultaneously learning our lines. Despite our lack of experience, or maybe because of it, we got along quickly and soon had most of the plans for a neighborhood production. Our backyard would be the site, we'd charge ten cents for adults and a nickel for kids under twelve, and the proceeds would be donated to the Dallas Dispatch Milk Fund. We saw no problem with every actor/actress having equal say in the direction, and we progressed quickly to the point of selling tickets around the neighborhood.

The big day arrived. We gathered all the lawn chairs and folding chairs from our homes, hung a couple of Mother's sheets on the clothesline for our curtain, and dispersed to have supper and get ready for our big debuts.

Our audience gathered and we were ready to start, but Rodney was late. When he did arrive, he said we'd have to change his character, for he'd had to scrub the bathroom floor and his dark pants were smeared with Bon Ami. (Since Rodney was the step child in his family, we considered he'd gotten off really light.) No problem; we decreed that he was a miller instead of a farmer.

Our parent/uncle/aunt/cousin audience was sufficiently enthusiastic about our performance that we felt very professional. My Mother and a couple of other mothers provided the cast and audience with lemonade and cookies. We counted our proceeds: three dollars and twenty-six cents (no explanation for the six cents) and were overwhelmed to discover that the Dispatch had sent a photographer to record the event. He agreed to deliver the money to the editor, and the next day we enjoyed our fifteen minutes of fame by viewing our picture in the paper and reading the three-inch review of our philanthropic efforts.

That turned out to be our only neighborhood project. We were proud of it and never felt the need to try to improve on our success.

Note: see "Backyard Drama"