

Remember When

By Jim Turner

The realtor's For Sale sign seems an anachronism, a thing out of place in time. Certainly it is irreverent. Behind it, on the slight rise, rest enormous volumes of memories; I hear trills of melodious laughter and sounds of happy gatherings, small and large. I see 26 happy diners enjoying homemade spaghetti and antipasto salad while seated at a seemingly endless table covered with red-and-white checkered tablecloths. I see annual Christmas Eve gatherings with family that begin with church services, followed by oysters roasted on the grill and culminate with the opening of one gift for each of us. The solitary gift provides a prelude to the bounty that will follow the next morning. Gazing beyond the sign, I recognize the growth marks of our two grandchildren, progressing from birth to their teens. Lying nearby were the bird feeders, the bikes and water sport gear—and so much more. We are told in Ecclesiastes, "For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under Heaven." Perhaps now is the time for a new beginning for us in another place, a smaller place where footfalls and echoes are quieted.

There were three or four unsold lots on the western end of the street when we parked in front on that beautiful fall day of 2001. Eastward on the same street there were several open lots among the existing houses, but the owners were holding onto them for whatever reason. The area was filled with stately live oaks, poplars and holly trees. The maritime forest offered its breathtaking beauty. Several of the oaks were masterful creations that had survived well over half a century of wind sculpting, gifting huge limbs that twisted skyward through the canopy like muscular arms reaching for sunlight. It seemed wrong to destroy them just to make room for a new house, but if not us, then someone else would do it and perhaps with less concern for maintaining the integrity of the forest and charm of the community. The forest was dense, but we knew somewhere to the south there was a state highway and, further still, the Atlantic Ocean.

One of my earliest memories of the town of Pine Knoll Shores community spirit involved our first meeting with the town's Community Appearance Commission (CAC) to seek approval of our architectural plan and discuss how it would impact the tree-filled parcel of land. We were a little anxious going into the site visit and the discussion regarding the removal of various trees. We had been forewarned that the CAC owned a reputation for being unyielding and was, in fact, nicknamed the "Pretty Committee." Most members were said to be angry displaced Yankees who wanted to teach all us redneck hicks how to maintain a proper and respectful community like those they had fled from up north. That reputation turned out to be undeserved, and we learned quickly that they were all extremely nice people who just happened to love living here and were devoted to preserving the place they cherished. The issue that most disturbed them centered around one of the most gorgeous trees I have ever seen. It was born to be illuminated, revered and, most of all, climbed. Its misfortune was that it just managed to grow to its fullness and its beauty right smack in the middle of where our house needed to be. There was no way to save it, and for a bit there was a standoff between the commission members and us. Finally, we made a suggestion to the town officials. If they determined that our lot was unbuildable, we would gladly sell it to the town for their use, though there would be a small profit due us for the inconvenience. In the end we negotiated a reasonable and

satisfactory solution. Unfortunately, it did not save the tree but neither did it destroy any goodwill between the Turners and our fellow citizens.

The emotions displayed all those years ago by so many citizens were somehow callously brushed aside in 2018 when someone or some group of individuals decided that the dense barrier south of our home was no longer worthy of protecting. The order was given to attack the vegetation with chain saws and cutting blades attached to arms extending from tractors. The action left big gaps of open spaces across the entire southern edge of our property and allowed us to see and hear every passing vehicle on the state highway. Our investments for irrigation systems and decorative plants were erased in a few short minutes, leaving hundreds of severed, twisted tree and shrub limbs exposed. We were assured that there was nothing to worry about and that springtime would bring new growth and everything would return to normal. Today, two years later, the gaps remain and the noise levels increase. When potential buyers walk past the sign and examine the property, the response is unanimous. Visitors love the home but are deeply disturbed by the loss of privacy and intimacy on the back screened porch. How does one measure the negative impact of that 2018 action on the current diminished property value? The CAC from 2001 would be mortified.

So what is next? Those of us born into the Silent Generation and the baby boomers generation are no strangers to change. We have witnessed fire and rain, have met and overcome adversity and expect there will be more challenges to come. Our household has packed and unpacked its share of moving boxes over the years and each move found us headed toward something rather than escaping from something. Why should this be different?

Our last home in Durham gave us comfort and joy for more than 20 years. Only the challenge of a new career move encouraged us to make the coastal trek sooner than we expected. Our long-time goal had been to retire to the beach, and we already owned a pleasant condo in a secluded residential area of Myrtle Beach. But there was a special allure that led me to retire from a comfortable and interesting position after 30 years and my talented better half to un-retire in order to help birth a new financial institution.

Our lives have changed in many ways in the nearly 20 years since, most all of them good. Untold adventures have been shared and wonderful friendships forged. A change does not mean these things will disappear; they will only expand. We sometimes play the "remember when" game, and the winner of the favorite place lived is always the same—Felixstowe, Suffolk, England. For a year, we were young, adventurous and invincible and were paid by the US Army for the privilege. Our years in the Beacon's Reach division of Pine Knoll Shores will surely compete with that youthful experience for the blue ribbon.

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