

# 'A Nice Place to Live'

By Margo Huston  
of The Journal Staff

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(The Milwaukee Journal, November 3,



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# Neighbors Make It Perfect

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together; one is white, another Vietnamese, the other black.

Sparrows chirp their appreciation at a feeder in the McBrides' front yard, and a sticker on their door declares: "Sherman Park Community — A Nice Place to Live."

Laughing, Mrs. McBride opened her door and said, "Welcome to this high crime area people are afraid to drive through." She then gave the grand tour of her five bedroom house. "I want you to know what \$31,000 can buy in a changing neighborhood."

It buys a living room with leaded glass windows and doors, oak trim and a huge fireplace. And new carpeting, draperies and rods. Ditto for the dining room. The original ceramic tile in the kitchen and in two full baths has convinced the McBrides that "in 1945 they put in the very best quality stuff."

It also buys a square tub that makes bath time a snap because Mrs. McBride's 3 and 4 year olds think it's a wading pool. And five bedrooms — three up and two down.

In the basement, there's a laundry, a rec room for the kids, a workshop for McBride and his older daughter, who takes shop at school. And there is Mrs. McBride's "very own special room" where she studies for courses she is taking toward a master's degree in educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee.

## No Trees

As she exited through the side door into a yard filled with the fragrance of sweet alyssum, Mrs. McBride apologized, "The yards are small, but that's just great for me. I always got overwhelmed by a big yard and then I'd stay inside."

Waving to a neighbor raking leaves a couple doors away, Mrs. McBride said, Hi, Hazel. This is the one "time of year I'm glad we don't have a tree."

She waved at another black person, her next door neighbor, then said, "I just love everybody being so close together."

She pointed across the backyards and across Townsend St. to a charming brick home built 34 years ago by its inhabitants, the Michael Kleins.

## 'Right Place'

"Right after we moved in, Edith Klein came over with a rhubarb cake and a dish of chopped liver and I said, 'Byron, we have moved to the right place.'"

To date, she says she has not once changed her mind about that.

When Edith Klein moved into the neighborhood, she certainly was not convinced it was the right place. And she laughed when she read the Spectrum article saying that the McBrides thought it

was the perfect neighborhood.

"This neighborhood happens to be the best buy," she said. "Because it's being integrated, you get the most for your money." When asked about the McBrides and the neighborhood, Mrs. Klein responded eagerly.

"It's a good, substantial, solid place to live. What else do you want?" she asked. Describing her husband and herself as the neighborhood grandpa and grandma, she



said, "We've been revitalized. We have a young family again. There are always children around again. It's good living, yes."

When the Kleins built in that area, no one was worrying about blacks moving in, but some people were worried nonetheless.

In detail, Mrs. Klein recalled the February evening her family moved in. Their two kids were sick, one with a respiratory infection, the other with the mumps. Add to that the inevitable chaos of moving and, Mrs. Klein said, it was enough to make a grown person cry. Which she did with abandon.

## No Parking

Then the phone rang. It was the neighbor across the street. How nice, she thought. Then she learned the neighbor had only called to warn the Kleins never to allow their company to park on his side of the street.

To Mrs. Klein the message came through loud and dreary, "Jews were moving into the neighborhood. He didn't like the idea that we were Jewish."

Shaking her finger, she said, "I vowed then and there that anyone who moves into a neighborhood is entitled to prove himself, to be hated or loved on his own merits without regard to race, color, creed or accident of birth."

So she bakes a cake and extends her own personal welcome. Pointing diagonally across the street, she added, "Judy Jacobson just burst into tears when I went to her place — oh, it must have been about a year now."

## Shed Tears

Edith Klein should talk. She did all but burst into tears when showing a visitor the Halloween card she received from the Friendly Club, composed of black and

white young girls, two of whom belong to the McBride family.

"They've asked me to be the guest speaker at their next meeting," she said.

Friendly Club co-founders Amy and Rebecca McBride make it clear the they love their new neighborhood best.

"The only bad thing is that there aren't any Puerto Ricans or Chinese living here. Then we could have a really integrated neighborhood," said Rebecca.

To Rebecca, the Friendly Club with its half black and half white membership, shows "that we can get along together and that we love each other."

"And I love my school," chimed in Amy.

"Things are going beautiful," declared their mother.

Even with the swastikas and suspensions at nearby Washington High School?

## Another Plus

"That has turned out to be another positive — just because the community responded so well," Mrs. McBride answered, going on to relate events leading to a special School Board meeting devoted to Washington. Both she and her husband, a psychologist who works for the State Division of Corrections and has a private practice, are active in the Sherman Park Community Association, which called the special meeting.

"We feel more community here than we ever did in a small town," she said. "I think of myself as being here the rest of my life. I just can't imagine a place with more to offer. Maybe you have to live in the boondocks half your life to appreciate Milwaukee, I don't know."

It didn't take long for Mrs. McBride to decide to go along with a followup story on her family's move.

"The last story was such a boost to the Sherman Park community," she said, "that we figure any crank phone calls would be worth it."

## Passive to Active

Mrs. McBride's gripe is not with her neighborhood, but with others' descriptions of it as a changing neighborhood, meaning changing from white to black.

"That's baloney," she said, pointing to four houses on her block which recently were bought by white families.

"I say the neighborhood is changing. But I say it's changing from older to younger, from passive to active

and from all-white to integrated."

But perfect?

"For me, I guess it is perfect, she said. "I'm doing things I really like to do, working with the School Board and the parents. It's fun. It's an ideal situation because everything I do here ties in with my work at the university. And it makes every day sort of neat."

She sat back, snuggling her youngest child Mickle on her lap. "Hungry, mama," he said. "I want a sandwich."

And so it goes.

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