

Canterbury Woods in the Early Years

Julie Kelly Kidd

The year was 1965. Lyndon Johnson was the US President, the Beatles were a sensation, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. As a six-year-old turning seven, I was clueless about what was going on in the world, but was quite aware of what was going on in my own world within and around Canterbury Woods. During the summer, my parents, Jean and Jack Kelly, my sister, Cindy, and I (Scott was not born yet) would drive from Arlington to visit our “house.” I must admit I thought my parents had gone crazy. We would drive to Chanticleer Avenue and stand and look at what to me was just a pile of dirt. Each visit, the pile would get larger, and I just couldn’t see how we were going to live in a house made of dirt until finally, on one visit, I could see that beyond the dirt a house was rising.

Shortly after Canterbury Woods Elementary School (CWES) opened, we moved into our house. That began my daily walk with Christine, Mark, and Julie Morin up to the bus stop on the corner of Queen Elizabeth Boulevard and Wakefield Chapel Road. It would be a couple years before we could walk to school and would no longer need to ride the bus from Wakefield Chapel Road to Braddock Road to Guinea Road to Braeburn Drive and finally to Willet Drive where Principal Carroll and our teachers were waiting to welcome us. The only things we were lacking at first were lights in our classrooms. I remember how shocked my mom was when I came home one day and announced that we finally had lights!

Once the lights were in place, we had just about everything we needed. Our classrooms were well stocked with construction paper for projects, textbooks for learning, and an Autoharp for singing. During non-lunch hours, the cafeteria served as the multipurpose room where we met with Mrs. Morales for physical education, attended assemblies, held our Girl Scout meetings after school, joined the rest of the school for Friday Movie Nights and the occasional CWES Spaghetti Dinner, and held the much-anticipated sixth-grade socials. We had a state-of-the-art library with shelves and shelves of books, filmstrip and reel-to-reel movie projectors, an up-to-date card catalog using the Dewey Decimal System, and a librarian who made sure the boys tucked in their shirttails. Weather permitting, we ventured outside to play dodge ball, monkey ball, kickball, four square, hopscotch, and jump rope. We built upper-body strength as we swung from bar to bar on the jungle gym and developed our legs as we ran around on the fields.

At home, in the neighborhood, we continued with games like SPUD and makeshift baseball. We roller-skated, biked, pretended we were secret agents, played school, and played with our dolls. In the beginning, playing outside was a bit challenging because there was no grass, just yards and yards of dirt that was often mud. I remember the day the sod was delivered and put down. All of a sudden, our surroundings looked more like a neighborhood and less like a construction site. However, it would be a number of years before the trees would grow. In the early years, with no trees to obstruct the view, we could see wide and far. My parents were so eager to see trees that we often took Sunday drives up and down the tree-lined streets in Kings Park.

The first few years, our Sunday drives also included driving past the site of our future community swimming pool. The opening of the pool was eagerly awaited and finally opened with a splash. I remember memorizing our pool number, 34, which coincidentally was also the

age my dad was going to be that year. At the age of nine, I finally learned to swim and that was the beginning of many summers of hanging out at the pool with friends, buying a pack of mini-jawbreakers from the vending machine, and wishing we were old enough to stay in the pool during break.

Fun did not pause in the winter. When the snow would fall, it seemed as if the whole neighborhood came to Chanticleer Avenue to sled down the hill. By day, the hill would be full of children flying down the hill on their sleds and then making the return trip up the hill with sleds in tow. At night, older teens and even some parents would venture out. We would stand there in awe and hope that the snow plows would stay away from our street another day.

Whether attending a function at the school, running around the neighborhood, gathering at the pool, or playing in the snow, Canterbury Woods was a magical place to be a child in those early years. However, I suspect that children who followed us may have felt the same. Those early years were more than just building houses, opening a school, laying sod, and planting trees. We created a community that continues on today.

Published in newsletter March 2015