Madrona: A Micro-Geography of the 1960s and 1970s

Through memory, detailed mappings, and archival research, the author explores the topographical and social fabric of the racially bifurcated neighborhood of Madrona, Seattle in the 1960s and 1970s.

By
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For everyone who was there.
Neighborhood is a seemingly simple word. We all use it without a second thought and usually believe ourselves to be understood. Yet its easiness deceives us as to how complicated and slippery it really is. Is it a set of streets? How big then, or how small? A group of people? Which people? Is it simply an administrative area bounded on a map by a municipality? And what about change over time? The complexity and slipperiness of the term neighborhood remain conveniently out of view unless something prods us to step back and try to pin it down.

So in my case, what has prodded me to step back and think about the word?

It was a troubling email recalling children and events in a school and a neighborhood decades ago. Don’t get me wrong—I was delighted to receive the email, which was a total surprise, from one of my best friends in the earliest years of grade school and who now lived on the opposite side of the country. I was pleased that Garrett remembered me and that he did so for the same reasons that I remembered him: we had boundlessly great times at recesses and lunch, running fast, swinging on bars, digging tunnels in sand, even rambunctiously climbing the trees just outside the playground’s chain-link fence. I remember clearly how after our first-grade trip to the zoo we had vowed to sneak back in one night and live on Monkey Island forever. He was the one friend who walked home with me some Tuesdays for lunch, and in his email he could even list what we ate on those days: split pea soup, tuna fish sandwiches, and a small salad consisting of cottage cheese nested on shredded lettuce and topped with peach halves. But in the email, I was also taken aback to learn that playing with me in those days was the highlight of his life—we always had so much fun, and I was such fun to be around—but that in high school, he had started hanging out with the wrong people and even wound up in jail. Although, he had since gotten all straightened out and raised a family and now had grandchildren.

Most troubling in his email was something that I had totally forgotten about: the perpetual public rivalry to be the smartest kid in the class. He wrote of how he had always tried to keep up with me and the equally vocal girl who aspired to be the smartest kid in class, but that he always came up short, unable to compete. This brought back to my mind the time I visited his house on 23rd Avenue, and I was so puzzled to see only one small bookcase in the corner of the living room, with just a handful of books. The other two contenders for the smartest kid in class were both the children of professors, and his house looked nothing like ours; in fact, it seemed from the email that the shape of his life had really looked nothing like ours.
His email spawned a gnawing cognitive dissonance. The same neighborhood, the same school, why such disparate outcomes? As the dissonance kept coming back like recurring but indeterminate tooth pain, I could tell that it was more than just the divergence of his path and my path that was clamoring for my attention. I found myself revisiting the places and events of my childhood. The more I concentrated on details of where I grew up and how, who I played with and when, where I felt safe and where I didn’t, the more I realized that addressing the dissonance lay in finding as many ways to portray my experience in my neighborhood as I could: not just through the rehearsal of familiar recollections, but through creating maps and spreadsheets that plotted friends by attributes such as race, gender and year, plotting violence by type, year and space, tracing preferred routes of transit, on foot, bike and bus, drawing affective maps with different colors for different emotions, even visualizing the topography of the neighborhood stripped of all housing, trees and bushes. And taking more steps to enrich and further prod my experience of the neighborhood through external descriptions, ranging from Census Bureau data to city and church reports, personal accounts, community newsletters, and even PTA memorabilia.

So what neighborhood am I talking about, specifically? Madrona, in Seattle, a neighborhood that lies somewhat south of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, somewhat north of the first floating bridge across Lake Washington, about three miles from downtown Seattle and Elliot Bay, with its eastern edge determined by Lake Washington, and its western edge lying somewhere near 23rd Avenue. That is a really loose definition, but as we will see, there can easily be a host of definitions. Not all will see the same things. These days, for instance, when I tell people that I grew up in Madrona, they often smile admiringly, nod in approval, and sometimes even add a softly spoken, “Nice!” They are thinking about a neighborhood with historic ambience exuded by flourishing trees, impeccable landscaping, and large, hundred-year-old houses in perfect order, each of which sells for at least seven figures. I refrain from telling them in the midst of their reveries that the Madrona they are picturing is not at all the Madrona I grew up in during the 1960s and 1970s. So, let me now say what the Madrona I grew up in was like.
The House at 425 35th Avenue

In 1961, my family moved from Wedgewood in the north end of Seattle and bought a larger, two-story house. It lay on 35th Avenue on a stub of a block between James Street and the bluff where 35th reached a dead end. I was a few months shy of two years old at the time. Following a nested model for describing my experience, I will start with my room as the smallest meaningful spatial unit. And when I say small, I mean small. I lived in this room for the better part of fifteen years and friends and family often joked about the room’s size. Elegant molding trimmed the ceiling, the two narrow windows, and both the entry and closet door. A broader, less intricate molding coursed just above the fir floor, which, though faded and even worn in spots, still harbored a gentle red-brown hue from its original coats of stain. The room’s smallness was due in part to other features that assured its privacy within the house. A small entry hall from the door paralleled the closet, both serving as a buffer and shrinking the room to an eight-by-eight-foot square. A large gap to accommodate an interior chimney muffled all sound from the bedroom next to mine. And my room lay on the second floor the farthest removed from my parents’ room. Such arrangements make more sense once
you know (and as I only recently learned) that my oh so small room was in fact the maid’s room.¹

Maid’s room or not, it was set at the very back of the house, and its two narrow windows faced west to 34th and north to James. For much of the year, I could see the thick canopy of maple leaves and sparser foliage of fruit trees, as well as glimpses of neighbors’ houses and mundane backyard trappings such as clotheslines and old stacked lumber. In winter, though, when the maples and fruit trees were mere skeletons, from the north window I could see the corner of 34th and James, while from the west window, through a small lot dotted with gnarled fruit trees, I could see all the way through to the houses on the other side of 34th. The west window was set directly above the peaked roof covering the garage walkway, and when I was older and more intrepid, I sometimes left the house by climbing out the window, treading carefully on the walkway roof, then transitioning to the peaked garage roof, and finally letting myself down to the ground via two fences of different heights. At an even later age, I sometimes skipped the fences and simply jumped off the garage. But this last, not too often. I still bear a whitish scar—which oddly never bled—where my two front teeth imprinted the flesh just beneath my lower lip when my chin had struck my knee with the full force of gravity.

Somehow my description of my bedroom as the smallest meaningful spatial unit has already slipped out of the windows, first by gaze then by transit, before rendering a full accounting of what might logically be seen as the next largest meaningful spatial unit: that is, the entire house. 425 35th Avenue was originally built in 1926, a three-bedroom house in the colonial variant known as the Federal Style. Set deeply back from the sidewalk, its face was a highly symmetrical two-story rectangle with a steeply pitched roof.

Two sash windows on the second story sat directly above two sash windows on the first story, which were spaced at even distances from the centered front door. Two thin, fluted pilasters framed the front door, crowned by a shallow triangular roof, with a black lantern-light hanging below it, which, when lit, illuminated a low brick stoop that required but one step down to set out on the matching brick walkway leading straight out to the sidewalk.²

Anyone who walked up the brick walkway and used the lion-faced doorknocker, was met by a triple choice when the door opened: immediately and in-your-face was a steep set of stairs leading straight up to the second floor; to the right, paneled double-doors led to the dining room and the kitchen just beyond; while to the left, another set of double doors opened to the living room, which was as deep as the dining room and kitchen combined. One could pass into the kitchen from either the living room or the dining room, and one could duck from the kitchen down the bare basement steps that were even steeper than those leading up from the front door. The second floor had two small bedrooms and a master bedroom that included a well-appointed closet and a small writing room. A built-in seat at the landing doubled as a lid for a laundry chute that dropped all the way to the basement. Hand towels and aprons could be tossed into the same chute from another opening in the kitchen. Unless the odd toilet at the bottom of the basement stairs was original (which I somehow doubt), the first design of the house included only one bathroom. Though graced with lovely white and blue hexagonal tiles, it was so very small that it made my future room look downright palatial. And however conveniently located to all three bedrooms, it was still on the second floor.

No big surprise, then, that the original owner requested an addition in 1936. Again working with the original architect, the expansion did much more than simply add toilets and sinks. And though I may seem to be straying from my topic by not immediately describing the further elements of the addition, it is not amiss in this micro-geography to say a word about both the owner of the house and the architect he chose to again employ. Both men, each in their own way, were tightly connected to the early Seattle power structure and both embodied through their activities—including the joint effort in the addition to this house—the values of that power structure.

The owner who commissioned the house was Frederick Austin Burwell. Before gaining his MBA from Harvard in 1924, Mr. Burwell graduated from Williams College in

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Massachusetts, where he studied Latin and wrote poetry, and before attending Williams College, the teenage Burwell had attended Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. The most famous recent graduate of this academy is Mark Zuckerberg, but other graduates through the centuries include Gore Vidal, George Plimpton, John Irving, two U.S. presidents, and Daniel Webster. Burwell could even trace his ancestry to the second sailing of the Mayflower.\(^3\) Closer to home, and long before the extensive inculcation of the finest education New England had to offer, Frederick was the nephew of Austin Peck Burwell, an Oberlin graduate and founder of the Seattle Hardware Company, an enterprise that went from merely successful to hugely successful through the provisioning of material needs inspired by the frenzy of the Yukon Gold Rush. Austin, who twice served on the Seattle Chamber of Commerce’s Board of Trustees, sold his interest in the Seattle Hardware Company to his brother, Frederick’s father, who had been a partner from the start, while he branched out into other enterprises, including real estate.\(^4\) Frederick’s uncle and father had built their large houses side by side on Queen Anne Hill,\(^5\) and Frederick, after returning from the northeast and marrying Elizabeth Baird, a graduate of Yale and granddaughter of a Chicago real estate magnate, eventually served as Chief Comptroller of the Seattle Hardware Company, living in his house at 425 35th Avenue.\(^6\) And he lived right next door to his uncle’s partner in the finance and mortgage industry, Seth Morford, of Morford & Burwell.\(^7\)

The architect that Frederick Burwell commissioned for the original house and its addition was, through family and business connections, a known and esteemed quantity. Andrew Willatsen had worked for three years as a draughtsman under Frank Lloyd Wright, and upon arriving in Seattle he quickly made crucial connections with prominent families and businessmen at the Rainier Club, a prestigious downtown venue. His first high profile Seattle project was the Highlands Golf and Country Club, and for this “country” site he incorporated elements of the Prairie Style architecture he had learned at the Wright

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workshop. But he also designed private homes for wealthy families and was committed to the principle that an architect’s role was to create houses that reflected the lifestyles and desires of the client. When asked to design period homes, such as the Federal Style home that Burwell desired, he paid close attention to details and materials, and included as appropriate elements such as built-in bookcases and china cabinets.  

The original design at 425 35th Avenue included such elements: a built-in china cabinet in the dining room that was mirrored in the bedroom directly above by built-in bookcases. In the addition that Burwell and Willatsen conjured up together, the house was extended to the rear, adding two bedrooms—including mine—two bathrooms, a third entry, and a short, covered walk to the garage. A utility closet provided not only a built-in work counter, but a small delivery cubby accessible from two sides, where the milkman or others could leave items by opening an outside door and residents could retrieve items from an inside door.

But these were little touches as compared to the crowning glory of the addition. Just beyond the living room, the two added another set of double doors, within which lay a paneled library with oak floors, a dark marble hearth with gray streaking, paneled wood framing the mantle both above and beside, a many-paned bay window on the south wall with a window seat below, and to the west another smaller window, also equipped with a window seat. Every other inch of space in the room was occupied by floor-to-ceiling shelving, the fine-grained hemlock shelves all stained a deep brown with faint red undertones to match the paneling.  

Though the white oak floor had been entirely covered by carpet in 1961, my guess is that this cozy but elegant library, more than any other feature of the house—such as, perhaps, the number of bedrooms, or the general neighborhood, or even the broad-canopied Madrona tree in the front yard—explained why my parents took out a loan and moved into that house. I could be wrong, of course, but it is probably a pretty good guess.


The House as Interpersonal Space

This brings us to consider the smallest meaningful social facet of this smallest meaningful geographic unit for those who lived in it: my family. My point now is to create a clear 1961 baseline for moving forward in time. As I was only nearing two years old when we moved that May, my consolidated memories are nil, so I have to construct the relevant baseline on key relevant information and surmises I have compiled advertently and even inadvertently ever since. The most basic information is this: the family who occupied this house consisted of five members: my Mom, my Dad, and three children. Prime examples of careful family planning, my siblings and I were each born in August, each two years apart. I was the youngest. There might have been four children but for the fact that my Mom’s final delivery—me—entailed some serious complications from Rh factor, and my parents acceded to the best medical advice in not risking another child. My oldest sibling, Karen, was born in 1955 in Ithaca, and my brother, Eric, was born in 1957 at Swedish Hospital, only two miles from our new house, the same hospital where I would be born. At the time we moved in, then, my sister was nearly six and my brother nearly four.

It is a bit harder to summarize key 1961 information about my Mom and Dad than my siblings because their lives and pasts had more threads and far more texture. But it is important to do so because those threads and textures would go a long way to informing the way my siblings and I would experience and even move through our neighborhood. One might think of this as the social double helix as opposed to the biological one. So here goes.

Both my Mom and Dad were only children who grew up in the Great Depression of the 1930s. My Dad’s Dad committed suicide in Denver in 1936 (good reason not to keep guns in the house) and my Dad ended up for a time with an uncle in Lubbock, Texas and then moved around in the Bay Area with his mother, living for some time at a boarding house in Livermore, but eventually spending most of his teenage years in East Oakland. He joined the Marine Corps in 1944 the day after he turned eighteen and saw combat duty on Okinawa in late May and June, and was later stationed in China. He took advantage of the GI bill after his discharge to pursue an academic career, getting his doctorate from Cornell, and landing a permanent position in 1956 at the University of Washington School of Medicine. The year I was born, he was publishing research results from work on undifferentiated stem cells in newts, articles still cited fifty years later.
My Mom’s background was somewhat different. Her Dad was a Methodist minister who was active in labor and social movements in the 1930s, and who later became the campus chaplain and a Sociology Professor at Mills College in Oakland. Methodism, activism, and a strong sense of right ran strong on this side of her family, as her Dad’s parents had been British missionaries in China, who later moved to California, and had become U.S. citizens in Hawaii in the 1920s. But her mother’s side of the family had a similar strain, although how strong this might have been did not become clear to me until 2014, when some odd memory from a 1968 conversation about a rocking chair popped into my head and talk of its being sent to a museum in Tabor, Iowa, sent me to the Internet to do some searching, which then sent me into my garage to retrieve a battered genealogical scroll with some name that rang a bell. I thought I was going to find a relative of the name I saw on the Internet search—but what I found was the very name itself. It turns out that my Mom’s great-grandfather, John Todd, had been a conductor on the underground railroad, and that the weapons used on the Harper’s Ferry raid had been temporarily stored beforehand in his basement (not that he was particularly happy about it.) A character in the novel *Gilead* is based on John Todd, and I am pretty sure that if I were to walk into the John Todd House Museum, I would see the rocking chair that had sparked the discussion so many years ago. In any case, some of my Mom’s behavior could certainly be traced to such activism and sense of right, even if she had pretty much dropped the God part out of it.

Both my parents smoked like chimneys, by the way.

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Topography is Fate: 35th Avenue and Parts East

Although the rear of our house as well as our garage and the bean-thread of a driveway leading to James street belonged more to 34th than 35th, one usually thinks of a house as belonging to the street it faces, so I will first describe the segment of 35th where our house stood. I could start with the people, the houses, and the trees, which is of course what I experienced and consciously remember most, but I will first strip all of these away in imagination to point to an underlying basis strangely obscured by these familiar features, but which, surprisingly (or not so surprisingly), contributed to their very manner of existence.

First of all, to the south, only one hundred feet away, lay a sheer drop-off, steep and so enmeshed in thorny blackberry bushes as to be impassible by even the most intrepid child. When we first moved in, there had been a long grassy slope, but underground sprinklers accidentally left on for several days in 1963 had created the unabashed cliff that I knew. The landslide took down a flank of hillside and even knocked one house right off its foundation. The city installed low, curved bars at the end of the sidewalk as a barrier. Over the years, while climbing, standing or hanging on these, we kids could see a patch of street that lay one block below, but we could not get down directly to it by any means—not by car, by bike, by foot, or even on hands and knees. The south edge of my neighborhood, then, was barely more than one house away.

Across 35th to the east, again imaginatively stripping away the houses, trees and people, lies a ridge running northward for several blocks. Only slightly less abrupt than the cliff to the south, its steep eastward pitch caused most streets arriving from the west to magically transform into narrow, leafy staircases suited only to hale pedestrians and children who liked to slide down handrails punctuated by large bumps. With the cliff on the south and the lengthy ridge across the way I was topographically isolated from all that lay below. To give an idea of what this meant: if I wanted to get one block due east, I had to go more than one block north, one block east, and more than one block south; or worse, I could go two blocks west, two blocks south, then two blocks wrapping back from east to north.

Another feature distinguishing the east side of 35th from the west side: when you imaginatively add the houses back in, you discover that the domiciles on the east side all had unstinting, panoramic views. For it had been built with an eye to securing the most staggering vistas of Lake Washington and the Cascades. The two houses at the end of 35th, even the one on the west side next to us, had perhaps the best views of all; not only Lake Washington and the Cascade Range, but the elegant thin line of the Floating Bridge, the wide green swathe of green foliage leading along the lake to Seward Park with its dark green forest, and, looming above it all, Mt. Rainier. If you have ever seen black and white photographs by Josef Scaylea titled Winter View From Madrona or Lake Washington Mist where the lake, bridge, and Mount Rainier are foregrounded by a small tree branch depending from a top corner, you are in fact seeing the view from the dead end on 35th Avenue in 1960 and 1962. Scaylea even used the 1962 photo as the first and last image in his book of Rainier photos, titled Moods of the Mountain. In the 1970s it served as a cover image for a book on Lake Washington.

I will now describe my neighbors on 35th and their houses, starting across the street and at the dead end.

First up: an enormous four-story house of sand-colored brick facing the bluff to both the east and the south. Though it had softening features such as leaded glass and a rounded entry portico, the main effect of this house was its effusion of solidity—sitting there like a giant block of granite that only accidentally had windows. It could be seen from as far
away as Seward Park, several miles to the south, and became even more visible from a
distance in the early 1970s after its owner had covered it with bright white paint embedded
with sparkles, added plastic turquoise shutters, and installed a colored spotlight in the
yard to shine on the house. At about the same period, on rare occasions when the front
door was open, one could glimpse a large red sofa shaped like lips. The color matched the
red of the convertible El Dorado Cadillac the owner drove at that time.

But that is looking ahead a bit. The owner of this monumental house was both then and
later, to say the least, unusual. At the time we moved in, he had a pet lioness named
Tammy that was kept for the most part in the basement.\textsuperscript{15} Many years later some of the
kids, who were now teenagers, told us stories about how they had rattled sticks on the
bars over the basement window to get the lioness to roar and growl. Not surprisingly,
neighbors petitioned the city to force the owner to get rid of the pet. My parents may
have been part of that lobby, though if they were, they never said so. The lion was soon
sold to an owner in Spanaway as a companion for another pet lion, but sadly, both broke
loose during the Columbus Day storm of 1962, and after one attacked a child, both were
shot and killed by the police.\textsuperscript{16} The pet lioness, however rare, was not unique in the neigh-
borhood. At the same, time, one block further north on 35\textsuperscript{th}, a forestry student was
nurturing a bear cub that he had found injured in the wild.\textsuperscript{17} No, our lion-owning neighbor,
Keith Rhinehart, had greater claims to exceptionality. I am quite confident that he was
the only person in our neighborhood to produce ectoplasm from his eyes and mouth, or
to founded a church of Ascended Masters. His church blended séances, theosophy, and
advocacy for according equal rights of sexual expression to people who were drawn to
members of the same sex. In 1965, he even hosted a local television show that openly
discussed this medley of issues. In April, shortly after the second segment had aired, he
was arrested and jailed on charges of sodomy.\textsuperscript{18} To put this into the context of my life,
this was about the time I was learning to tie my own shoes, and the same month that a
6.5 magnitude earthquake knocked a scattering of bricks off our chimney. I only remember
this because I was struggling to tie my shoes before setting out for school when the books
started flying off the shelves inside our house. Between legal tribulations and spiritual
travels, Rhinehart was sometimes home and sometimes gone for long stretches. When

\textsuperscript{15} Don Paulson, \textit{Don Paulson Papers}, University of Washington Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{16} Alan J. Stein, “Columbus Day Windstorm Ravages Puget Sound Region on October 12, 1962,”

\textsuperscript{17} Brian T. Callahan, \textit{Margaret Callahan: Mother of Northwest Art} (Victoria, British Columbia: Trofford

\textsuperscript{18} Gary L. Atkins, \textit{Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging}. (Seattle: University of Washington Press,
2003), 86.
he was home, people came and went, never tarrying outside the house, but footing the
distance between car and door quickly and directly. Even when he was gone, though, the
home had presence, but maybe that was just due to the huge granite block of a house
itself.

The capacious wooden house directly across from ours and next to Rhinehart’s was just
as symmetrical as our colonial but seemed far less boxlike. It had a pillared porch and
balcony framing the entry that were all part of a central projection of the house itself,
and it was graced with its own steeply pitched roof. And while the couple that lived in
this house was not as flashy as the clairvoyant to the south, they had their own muted
claims to difference. Phil Williams was a corporate lawyer who wore a suit and caught
the bus to and from work downtown every weekday but lawyering (if that is a word) was
not his real avocation. His passion, as his wife’s, was performing and enjoying bluegrass
music. His wife, Vivian, was a state fiddling champion and the couple formed the nucleus
of a band that in the early days was called the Turkey Pluckers. Musicians and other friends
often visited, sometimes for extended stays, but hosts and guests alike were never loud,
always low-key, in fact, rather like the pale green Volvo station wagon the couple drove.
Although occasionally we could hear people playing music in the evenings or on weekends,
nothing interfered with the husband’s regular, suited transits to work and back. The fiddle
champion, whose long hair was usually braided into a long ponytail, was very tolerant of
children passing through their front yard in various playful pursuits. She passed beyond
tolerance and was blatantly encouraging as my brother and I used nets to try capturing
the large butterflies that were particularly drawn to the tall laurel hedge on the north
side of their yard.

Such tolerance abruptly ceased on the other side of that same laurel hedge. Our butterfly
pursuits were acutely disturbing to the neighbors whose property lay to the north. I say
property rather than house for more than one reason. Most obvious was the extent of
the place itself, with a greenhouse on the south, a private graveled driveway to the north,
a carriage house to the rear, and brick parterres negotiating the steep slope behind, setting
out a yard arrayed like a mini Dumbarton Oaks. Various forbidding signs also announced
this domicile as property. It was not just the fact that the front yard lay in the perpetual
shade of a looming Douglas Fir. No, it was more the way that the front perimeter was
secured by an immaculate box hedge and latching front gate that together performed a
barring function similar to the taller and thicker laurel hedge to the south. And, perhaps
because social engineering through the disposition of plants was not enough, deep down
the driveway was a sign planted in the ground, bearing two large eyes and bold crimson
text that announced, “We’re watching you!” The residents also actively enforced their
property rights in person. The man of the house was notorious for seizing as his own any ball of any kind that happened to cross the box hedge.

Three residents lived in the house: a couple of a certain age, the Thackerys, and an older woman, perhaps a mother-in-law, perhaps an aunt, named Mrs. Wright. The trio had seemingly been ensconced in the house as long as anybody could remember. Whether the older woman lived with her daughter or son-in-law first or whether they joined her later or whether they all moved in at the same time is anybody’s guess. But this elegant house with its expansive views, dumbwaiter, and speaking tubes from the kitchen to the third-floor servants’ quarters was doubtless suited to a woman who claimed relationship to Charles Barstow Wright, a notable mover and shaker in the Northwest at the end of the nineteenth century. As President of the Northern Pacific Railroad, Wright financed and organized the final stretch of empire-building that brought the railroad to Tacoma, and as an early Tacoma luminary he served as President of the Tacoma Land Company and co-founded The Annie Wright Seminary, named in honor of his daughter. Mrs. Wright’s hair was so white as to be blue, and she was always immaculately dressed as she led the black household poodle, Marquis, on a limited circuit beyond the hedge of less than a third of a block. Her face was also ghostly white. I’ve always assumed it was an application of make-up, but we rarely got close enough to see.

The Thackerys and Mrs. Wright and their manner of life seemed like vestiges of a much earlier population on 35th Avenue. And not just the 35th Avenue itself that ran atop the ridge, but the labyrinth of streets in Madrona that dropped sharply eastward to the lake. To get at what I am talking about another act of imagination will help—but this time, instead of stripping away the trees and houses, I will strip away some decades to note who lived there or acted there and what they were doing to make there, there.

First up, of high relevance to my immediate block: C.T. Conover. Though not a Madrona resident, all the houses I have described, including mine, were built on a 1907 plat officially named Conover Park, after one of its initiators, Charles Talmadge Conover. Though originally a Seattle journalist, Conover forged a real estate partnership with another journalist, Samuel Crawford, and as Crawford and Conover, the firm became an early and enduring giant in Seattle real estate development. Conover also assumed promotional roles for the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and took credit for first heavily touting

Washington as the Evergreen State. An ardent Seattle booster who had developed many properties with grandiose views of Mt. Rainier, it is not surprising that he gave voluble testimony before Congress against a bill proposing to change the mountain’s name from Rainier to Tacoma.

Second up: a quick scan of the membership of the Madrona Heights Improvement Club in 1900. It included bankers, lawyers, businessmen, a judge, and even the Seattle mayor, Hiram Gill, who lived on 35th between James and Cherry. Harold Preston, who would later serve on the state legislature and run for U.S. Senate, lived one block further on 35th between Cherry and Columbia. Known to us kids as the “castle house” because of its many-windowed turret with a conical roof, a more intimate view of Preston’s house and lifestyle was provided by the author Mary McCarthy, who recounted living with the Prestons after her parents had died in the 1918 flu epidemic. It is not surprising to learn that it was a house where ice cream was churned every Sunday and where the teenage writer-to-be could watch crew races from the third-floor sleeping porch outside the maid’s bathroom. Interestingly, Mary also recounted attending the Annie Wright Seminary in Tacoma. Farther north on 35th lived Franz Richter, President of the Pacific Coast Rubber Company. Judge Charles B. Wood lived on 37th and the banker B.W. Pettit lived on 36th. The outlier (by house address) of the improvement council was another banker, J. R. Pidduck who lived on 32nd and James.

Charles Evans Fowler, a future President of the Madrona Heights Community Club and resident of 35th Avenue, and additionally a Trustee of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, held yet another position closer to the turn of the century. As President of Seattle’s Board of Park Commissioners, Fowler contracted with the famous Olmsted Brothers firm as early as 1903 to begin elaboration of a park and byway system that would include Lake Washington Boulevard, a scenic and woody route framing frequent mountain and lake

22. The Broadcast, Madrona-Denny-Blaine Community Club, April 1937.
views running the distance from the University of Washington to Seward Park, with the penumbra of this greenbelt bathing the eastern hillside of Madrona.26

Of course, one did not have to be on the Madrona Heights Improvement Club to improve the neighborhood. For instance, Dr. Alfred Raymond, taking advice from a friend and neighbor, who happened to be C. T. Conover’s partner Samuel Crawford, switched his investments at the turn of the century from mining stocks to real estate, and after some shrewd dealings in downtown real estate, became one of the wealthiest physicians in Seattle.27 The prime lots he chose for a house suited to this level of financial probity bordered the entire block of Cherry that spanned the steep abyss from 35th to 36th. In 1903, John Charles Olmsted and a colleague had even snapped a photo of the lake and vista from the very top of this site.28 Dr. Raymond hired Joseph Côte, who had recently completed his commission for St. James Cathedral, and a thirty-room Georgian mansion, complete with carriage house, was built in 1912.29

Five years earlier, Louis Hemrich, President of the Seattle Brewing and Malting Co., at the time the largest brewery west of the Mississippi, and later famous for Rainier Beer, had a large timber and stone house built at the corner of 35th and Columbia, designed by the Craftsman-inspired architect Ellsworth Storey.30 A few years before that, H. J. Ramsay, lawyer and member of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, had a more modest but none-theless well-appointed colonial house built for his private residence a few doors south and across the street.31


Even two individuals successively holding the title of City Engineer lived in Madrona.\(^{32}\) One was R. H. Thomson, who became City Engineer in 1892 and was responsible for a number of projects that changed the Seattle landscape forever, including the Lake Washington Ship Canal and several massive regrade projects. He also laid out the first version of Lake Washington Boulevard, originally as a bike path, literally creating the groundwork for the gently curving road and greenbelt that the Olmsteds later elaborated.\(^{33}\) Thomson lived on 34th Avenue shortly before it curved into Madrona Drive, which itself curved down to merge with the scenic boulevard built on the basis of the bike path he had helped to create. When Thomson retired in 1911, his successor as City Engineer was Arthur H. Dimock, and he too lived in Madrona: in fact, he lived in the Williams’ house right across the street from my house.\(^{34}\)

Many of those I have mentioned did not simply know each other from living in the neighborhood but through membership in private clubs and associations of varying exclusivity. Some were members of the Arctic Club, the College Club, or the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, giving them the advantage of extensive and favorable acquaintance throughout the city. Some were also members of the extremely exclusive Rainier Club, where John Charles Olmsted lived for two months in 1906. During that time, he not only worked on designs for the 1909 Yukon exposition that would shape the future University of Washington campus and continued work on a proposed city-wide park and boulevard system, but also performed residential work for private clients whose acquaintance he made at the club. His first private client, in fact, was C. H. Black, then-current President of the Seattle Hardware Company.\(^{35}\)

A report on Madrona in the 1960s described the ridge on 35th Avenue as an edge that divided the neighborhood, creating two sub-neighborhoods with distinct features to east and west.\(^{36}\) Those later differences of course derived more from the grafting of social facets onto the topography than the ridge or slope itself, and such grafting had started even before the turn of the century. The ridge and eastern Madrona had originally been

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Topography is Fate: 35th Avenue and Parts East

Dubbed Drexel Heights, and Drexel was name of 35th Avenue until 1895. It also had the distinction of being the first street in all of Madrona to be paved, providing superior access to the fine houses atop the ridge. But as it evolved, rather than standing alone in gaudy isolation, the street melded eastward with the winding, complicated roads of the hillside below, which in turn melded seamlessly into the greenbelt of Lake Washington Boulevard, with many houses on the hillside yielding, like the boulevard itself, park-like prospects of trees, lake, and mountains. The sub-neighborhood in a sense built itself not only on the ridge at its top, but on the boulevard at its base, imbibing its spirit, mirroring

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its attributes, and wholeheartedly taking its place in the chain of the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt that ran north and south along the lake. The civic ethos of such green parks and boulevards—and the Olmsted firm was a national leader in promoting this ethos—was to provide city residents a counterbalance to the unnatural strains and moral evils of urban living.\textsuperscript{39} But an equally important pillar for the materialization of such projects was the value that nearby property stood to gain. John Charles Olmsted, fully aware of this confluence of interests, even chided Seattle's Board of Park Commissioners, noting in a 1909 letter that Lake Washington Parkway was designed primarily for the benefit of the city as a whole and only incidentally to benefit the neighboring private property.\textsuperscript{40}

The movers and shakers among early Madrona residents did not always see it exactly that way. Developing plats within proximity of the cable car, lakeside recreation, and building residences on sites with stellar views went hand in hand with a clamor for general amenities that made the neighborhood more livable, more desirable, and the properties ever more valuable. Active Drexel Heights community members successfully lobbied in the 1890s for things like electric lighting and larger pipes for water and waste.\textsuperscript{41} The Madrona Heights Community Improvement Club was succeeded by the Madrona Community Club in the 1920s and by the Madrona-Denny-Blaine Community Club in the 1930s, but its members all along continued to lobby the city for various practical needs while actively promoting the values and virtues of the neighborhood. The club paper clearly outlined those values and virtues in a 1937 article listing the many advantages of Madrona.\textsuperscript{42}

Scenery, climate, and lakeside recreation were, surprisingly, not first on the list. Accessibility was number one: Madrona was only three miles from downtown. But there was more to accessibility than just distance. It was also a matter of where you had to drive through to get there. Unlike Montlake or Mount Baker, Madrona residents did not have to drive through a “colored” section to get home from downtown. This advantage was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} John C. Olmsted, \textit{Letter to J.M. Frink, President Board of Park Commissioners, Central Bldg, Seattle, Wash.} Jan 8,1909. Seattle Municipal Archives.
\item \textsuperscript{41} John W. Pratt, \textit{Revised Ordinances of the City of Seattle Together with the Freeholders’ Charter, Adopted, 1890; Amended 1892} (Seattle: F. Anthony, 1893), 740, 744, 801.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Willis Brindley, “Madrona Real Estate: What’s Wrong With It, and What to do About it,” \textit{The Broadcast}, Nov. 1936, 1–3.
\end{itemize}
further echoed under the category of Social Environment, where the author noted that people were proud to say they lived in Madrona, a neighborhood that included practically no “colored people,” no “Orientals,” and no “objectionable foreign races.” With this in mind, it is not particularly surprising to learn that the first listed requirement for membership in the club’s 1920s by-laws was for a person to be “of the Caucasian race.” It also raises the tantalizing question of what exactly was involved in their last listed accomplishment for the year 1927–28. In a year that included the installation of stop signals at 34th and Union and repairing stairs between 35th and 36th all the way from Cherry to Marion, the last accomplishment reads: “The undesirable element problem is taken in hand.”

By the way, did I mention that when we moved into our house on 35th, everybody on the other side of the street, for at least three blocks, was White?

Not that I particularly noticed this as a child. My radar was more attuned to something else about the opposite side of the street: the dearth of children. Between the dead end and Cherry there was only one family with children. No children lived with the clairvoyant, or with Phil and Vivian Williams, or with the Thackerys and Mrs. Wright, or with the ancient woman we dubbed Mrs. Beep Beep because she always honked her horn at us, or with the doctor who sometimes had male roommates, or the limping man who lived alone in a house where mayor Gill had lived fifty years before, and not Old Man Hatchet (and I have no idea why, how, or when we gave him that name.) If there were ever any children across Cherry in the British Consulate now occupying the redbrick, white-trimmed Georgian house built by Dr. Raymond, I never saw them. The one family with kids on that all-White side of the street had one boy my brother’s age, Bradley. He and my brother became friends, and in time, by extension, so did I.

But what about our side of the street? Were there any kids other than my brother, my sister and me? Teenagers lived right next to us on both sides, but that was something entirely different. They were babysitters, not playmates. Two adopted daughters nearing their mid-teens lived with a retired admiral and his wife in the three-story Georgian house that perched on the southern bluff. They babysat for us once or twice, but not after my parents returned home to find all the paintings on the walls hanging upside down. In the

43. Madrona Community Club, Constitution and By-Laws of Madrona Community Club, 1926, University of Washington Special Collections, Madrona History Project.

44. Madrona Community Club, Work Accomplished by the Madrona Community Club During the Year From Jun [sic] 6th, 1927 – June 4, 1928, University of Washington Special Collections, Madrona History Project.
more sedate red-brick house to the north, lived a family who had probably moved in with five kids but now had mostly teenagers and emerging adults on their hands, all boys except the youngest and oldest. Because of my age, I only remember the youngest one babysitting for us, and as far as I know, she never hung the paintings on the walls upside down. I do know, however, that my nervousness around large safety pins is indelibly associated with that babysitter. The father of the family was a vendor in the grocery business and the mother had a permanent administrative position at the Goodwill on Dearborn Avenue. The boys were all athletic and sports-crazy and later when they included us in their fun, we also found them to be great founts of neighborhood lore. It is from one of them that I learned that the end of the street used to be a grassy slope, because he recalled how, shortly after we had moved in, he repeatedly slid me down the grass, much to my glee, but causing even more riotous laughter for himself and his brothers, because each time I slid down, my pants had come off and revealed my diapers. At a later date, and this I can remember, the brothers and their friends liked to hold us by the arms and legs, one, two, three, and pretend to toss us over the bars at the cliff’s end on the count of three. Such older to younger kid dynamics aside, when we first moved in they could not really be classed as playmates. There were two other kids on the next block on our side of 35th that I can only just remember, two brothers, Peter and Paul, both Black, perhaps twins, and at least one of them had blue eyes. I vaguely remember being in their house once before they moved away, but I think they were more the age of my brother or sister.
If 35th was practically a child desert, 34th Avenue, only yards away, was the opposite. It was loaded with kids.

But that was not the only difference.

In fact, about the only similarity was that 34th reached a steep-drop dead end like 35th. But where fine houses graced the bluff on 35th, the larger expanse at 34th was a study in vacancy: a motley assortment of Scotch broom, thistles, remnants of a razed house, and two concrete platforms jutting into space, dreams, perhaps, of a failed developer, one platform facing Mt. Rainier to the south and the other facing east to the continuing line of the Cascades. The houses on 34th were consistently smaller than those on 35th, trees were fewer, and yards simpler. Even the houses on the west side of 34th, situated on the brief rise to 33rd, were relatively modest in size, for the rise was simply not high enough to yield panoramic lake or mountain views. West of 33rd, the terrain began a gradual descent to Empire Way, covered by uniformly even city blocks and crisscrossed by a waffle-iron street grid that linked it seamlessly to long stretches of blocks west, north, and south. The houses on these straight stretches had always been more modest than those in the erstwhile Drexel Heights.

As a child of course none of this concerned me. My prime directive was to play. 34th was where the kids were. And it was really easy to get there: out our back gate, through a missing picket in the neighbor’s side-yard, across or down our driveway, it didn’t matter which, and presto, I was there. My first friend who was my exact age lived on this corner and my earliest memory of him was sneaking into each other’s kitchens and making sandwiches—more like tacos in shape—that consisted of wads of butter and copious brown sugar folded into a single slice of white bread. He had many older siblings who took charge of the house when his Mom was at work, and we ate these as fast as we could before anyone could catch us in the act. His house was like a magnet for kids, with so many siblings, two open porches and unkempt yard spaces to play in. The corner of 34th and James was in itself a natural gathering spot, too, strangely insulated by dead ends. James went dead at 35th and 32nd, while 34th and 35th went dead just past James. The west side of 34th between James and Cherry was also strangely insulating, occupied as it was by a nursing home, whose residents we never saw, and the remains of another razed house, with its assortment of thistles, concrete chunks, glass and blackberries.
The second neighborhood friend my age lived with his grandmother in a house diagonally behind us to the south. Thinking back to tricycle age—that is, the time before starting school—what I distinctly remember is the joy of us both jumping off stumps of old fruit trees in the lot next to his yard, shouting for all we were worth, “Underdog!” and “Superman!” I still have a picture taken at his birthday party, which, save for the existence of the picture, I do not remember at all. We were both on the small side, which is something I do remember. The photo was taken in front of the screen door to his house, most of us with party hats on, all squinting into the bright sun from the west.

Except for another taller girl, whose name for the life of me I can’t remember, and who did not live on 34th very long, I am the only White child in the picture.

Which highlights what might be taken as the most obvious difference between 35th across the street from my house and 34th behind it: all White one way, nearly all Black the other. And serving as a mottled gradient, at least as far as Cherry, was my side of 35th, an alternation of Black and White households.

As a quick aside, to address any concerns about my use of “Black,” I learned it and experienced it as a term of proud self-affirmation, and have always seen it in that light. “African American” as a term has its own merits, bearing a weight of dignified formality, and also preferred by some as self-assigned, so I sometimes employ it as well. But further in regard to “Black” and “White”, my rationalization for capitalizing “White” lacks the same component of historic self-affirmation as “Black,” but is intended as a constant reminder to the reader, that, like “Black,” it is not meant to describe skin color; in which case—at least for me—pink would be more accurate. And as an aside to this aside, I would also add that each perspective, memory, and conjecture in this writing—all phenomenon subsisting in the self-observing vehicle that is me—are subject to influences of my contingent existence as White, but too, as White in a largely Black community.

But to get back to 34th and 35th, anyone looking for confirmation of the stark bifurcation I have described in Census Bureau statistics will be disappointed. Block level data uses the island block as its unit of measure, and in so pooling numbers from both halves of a block, blurs any sharper pattern that might be present. The anomaly of the nursing home further clouds the picture, skewing counts for both age and race. Worst of all, an ungainly census block pools about eight standard blocks into one huge block, combining the abrupt 34th and 35th dead ends with the winding and contiguous segments of 33rd, Terrace, and 36th far below. The residential heterogeneity of these spaces simply melts when the topography is pooled this way.
Fortunately, the block statistics provide counts as well as percentages, and it is possible to gain more granularity by adjusting the counts from memory, then adjust the percentages accordingly.\textsuperscript{45} Though by no means infallible, my house-by-house recount of the ungainly block yielded an eighty-six percent Black population living on the 33\textsuperscript{rd}, 34\textsuperscript{th}, and westerly Terrace portion, and an eight percent Black population for the portions including 35\textsuperscript{th}, 36\textsuperscript{th} and the northeast curve of Terrace. That presents a hugely different picture from the fifty-eight percent Black population listed for the entire block as by the 1970 Census. Even allowing for inevitable flaws of my memory, I am confident anyone who lived there at the time is likely to confirm this as a more accurate representation. I applied the same recount from memory for the block bounded by Cherry, James, 34\textsuperscript{th} and 35\textsuperscript{th}, and it offered a similar though less dramatic corrective. Instead of the overall eighty-one percent Black population ascribed to the whole block by the 1970 Census, when I divided

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{population_race_age_distribution.png}
\caption{Population Race and Age Distribution Illustrated From Two Sources}
\end{figure}

The visual on the left presents 1970 Census Block data. Such block data, which pools populations into “island” blocks, conveys no information regarding distribution within a street block. For lack of more information, this can inadvertently suggest the distortion of an even distribution, as shown on the left. The visual on the right presents a corrective. Working from memory circa late 1969–early 1970 (but maintaining the total Census count for block 307) it arrays populations by street segments on 34\textsuperscript{th} and 35\textsuperscript{th}. Note the vast differentials in race, density, and age on the two sides of the alley. Note too, the uniformly White and heavily-over-eighteen population on the far (eastern) side of 35\textsuperscript{th}. Topographically, and not unrelatedly, that side of the street is where the glorious view-sheds of Lake Washington and the Cascades open widely.

at the alley, I came up with eighty-five percent Black on the more populous 34th side and fifty percent on the less populous 35th side. A more accurate picture, to be sure, but still prone to error and definitely fraught with the quicksand frailties of Census counts: had the Black Dad and White Mom on 35th listed their three children as White or as Black? What guess could I make to keep my count as accurate as possible? I finally opted to count them as I imagined the parents would have counted them.

The population beyond 34th did not become magically White on 33rd as it did across the other way on 35th. Nor did it do so on 32nd, 31st, 30th, or anywhere for blocks and blocks north, west and south. The waffle grid of streets merged unnoticeably and without fanfare from Madrona into reaches of the Leschi, Mann, Minor, and Madison neighborhoods, reaches that were also predominantly Black. Clearly, the days were long past when Madrona boosters could proudly boast about not having to drive through a “colored section” to get to and from downtown.

The concentration of a Black population in these and other adjacent neighborhoods (broadly referred to at the time as the Central Area) had happened both rapidly and recently. Between 1940 and 1970, Seattle’s Black population increased from about 4,000 to nearly 27,000. Of these, a vast majority was jammed into the Central Area. Why, you may ask, do I say jammed? Well, for one thing, jammed implies jammers, and there was no shortage of these, both in the form of useful tools and the people that used them. Some jammers were of an institutional nature. Maps, for instance, were created as guidelines for bankers to understand areas of greater and lesser risk. Relying on these maps that listed factors such as the age and condition of housing, industrial adjacencies and race, lenders often denied loans for purchase or improvement in areas delineated as hazardous or deteriorating. The hazardous zones for granting loans were garishly outlined in red, and the practice established by these maps is consequently known as redlining. By the logic of such maps these areas naturally grew even more dilapidated and run-down for lack of financing. And when loans were provided, harsher terms were often imposed, such as payments of one-third down in cash and higher interest rates.

So who would be inclined to live or buy in such places, or put up with such terms? People who were prevented from buying or living elsewhere. Enter another set of institutional


48. United Good Neighbor Fund of King County. *United Good Neighbor Fund of King County, Planning Division, Sub-Committee on the Leschi and 3-M Areas*, ([Seattle?): [The Committee ?], 1961), 4.
jammers: real estate agents engaged in discriminatory practices. Realtors were often very selective in showing, let alone selling houses. This problem was so prevalent in 1963 that a Seattle civil rights group publicly announced Operation Windowshop, a series of weekend events in which Black couples accompanied by at least one White person would visit advertised suburban homes. On the first announced weekend, ninety-five percent of the real estate offices responded by staying shut. The Executive Vice President of the Seattle Real Estate Board reported afterward that there had been no organized movement to close down, but that many realtors had objected to leading a “parade of Negroes who had no intention of buying homes” through houses on sale outside the Central Area.49

Such discriminatory practices were not restricted to the suburbs. One Madrona realtor was especially notorious for it. Mrs. Rita Lee, who opened Lake Washington Realty at 34th and Union in 1936, went great lengths to maintain what she viewed as the right kind of neighborhood. When she showed my Mom our house in 1961, she drove her by way of the Arboretum and the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt rather than by 23rd Avenue, which would have been far faster.50 In 1962, a formal letter of complaint against Mrs. Lee was filed with the Better Business Bureau, the Mayor, and the Governor. The plaintiff was a prospective Black buyer, who also happened to be the Vice President of the Seattle Branch of the NAACP. She complained that she had not been shown the house she had expressed

50. The Broadcast, Madrona-Denny-Blaine Community Club, November 1936.
interest in but had been taken to a house that only remotely fit the description, was not even for sale, and moreover, whose owner turned out to be a mutual acquaintance of another friend. Sharing notes with the owner of the house, both marveled that the realtor, first of all, had a key to her house, but secondly, had the temerity to call ahead, make sure nobody was there, and then “show” it to someone.\textsuperscript{51} Corporate Counsel responded on the behalf of the mayor, noting that it was his professional opinion that no city ordinance had been violated, and that if she felt such conduct was illegal, she and her organization should inform members of the next session of the State Legislature.\textsuperscript{52}

Another institutional jammer that precluded Blacks from living elsewhere required the mutual connivance of property owners, bankers, realtors and title companies, and took the form of the restrictive covenant. These were clauses in real estate deeds that prohibited purchasers from afterward selling the property to “negroes,” “mongoloids,” “Orientals”—the terms seem to vary depending on who was writing it—but the general idea being that they could only sell it to White people.\textsuperscript{53} Newly minted real estate developments often included such language (including one plat in Denny Blaine) but residents in established neighborhoods could also vote to retroactively incorporate such language in the deeds to their houses. Crawford and Conover, by the way, were known to regularly include such restrictive clauses in their later developments.\textsuperscript{54}

If covenants and realtor practices somehow failed to exclude Blacks from certain neighborhoods, there was a further deterrent in the face of such failure: terrorize Blacks that moved in. Burning crosses on a yard at night, though not common, was not unheard of in Seattle, and it had even happened to some of my neighbors at their U-District house before they had moved to Madrona.\textsuperscript{55} Even if Blacks succeeded in buying a home beyond the Central Area, a warm welcome was never assured, and concerns for safety served as yet another inhibiting factor.

Realtors also had a practice that specialized in trading on fear, but in this case trading on the fears of White homeowners. The practice was known as blockbusting. The logic was

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that if Blacks moved in, your property values would go down and, god forbid, your house might end up in a redlined district and be worth continually less, and maybe you would not be able to sell it at all. Really unscrupulous realtors would move one Black family in, and then start drumming up business on the nearby streets and blocks. If they were really clever and unscrupulous, they could leverage both White fear and Black desire to increase their profits. Because Black people found it so hard to buy homes anywhere else or even find a bank willing to finance a Central Area home, the realtor could step in as lender for the sale, with terms very favorable to his or her interest. Let it not be thought, however, that the White fears were solely about financial interests and resale values. As one letter to the mayor bluntly put it in 1964 when bewailing the city’s proposed Open Housing Ordinance, “though most people won’t openly admit it, they want to keep themselves and their children removed from the Negro influence.”

Blockbusting, White flight, redlining, restrictive covenants, threats of violence, and refusal to sell Black people properties elsewhere all served to corral a majority of Seattle Blacks into the Central Area, filling in a run of neighborhoods between a long-established Black neighborhood on Madison, and another older, if more risqué, Black community near Jackson. How massive was the shift? Here is a sample swatch: between 1950 and 1960 the overall ratio of Whites to non-Whites in the Leschi, Madrona, Mann and Minor neighborhoods went from three to one, to one in four. Numerically, this meant roughly 13,000 fewer Whites and 12,000 more non-Whites in a mere ten years. The trend did not abate after 1960, as Seattle's Black population grew by another 11,000 over the next decade, and the transformation of previously mostly White neighborhoods with a strong Jewish presence became nearly complete. The closest thing to an anchor for this nexus of neighborhoods that stretched over so much rolling terrain—now rising, not falling, now flat—was Garfield High School, the monumental, 1920s building hovering near 23rd and Cherry, that waited to serve all high school students in its range and had done so for decades. Garfield enrollment figures offer a clear reflection of the rapid shift that had taken place in population: in 1940, eighty-five percent White; in 1962, fifty-one percent Black; and in 1973, 81 percent Black. Enrollment statistics also reflected the residential

57. United Good Neighbor Fund, The Leschi and 3-M Areas, 3.
concentration of Blacks in the area it served: in 1962, seventy-five percent of all Black high school students in the Seattle School District attended Garfield.\textsuperscript{60}

The complete picture, though, was not just one of neighborhood change, racial segregation, and limited housing opportunities. As elsewhere in the country, much of the post-war Black migration out of southern states was undertaken by people hoping to find a better way to get by than where they were, where they were often already struggling, and arriving in a new place without the supports of advanced education, professional expertise or financial security. While many came and successfully continued in the military or made their way into gainful employment or professions, many also continued to struggle.\textsuperscript{61} So, it was not just a racial concentration but a socio-economic concentration, by no means improved by being corralled into overcrowded, dilapidated housing. The hope that Seattle would prove to be a place where anyone willing to work hard could succeed for some just did not pan out. As more and more newcomers arrived, they found themselves stacked on top of each other in old houses that required sweat equity or money to remedy years of neglect, which meant both time and money, often in short supply. Again, using the combined swatch of Leschi, Madrona, Mann and Minor: in 1960 (of course excluding the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt), 9.3 percent of the residents were on public assistance, compared to a city average of 2.9 percent. That same year, in these same neighborhoods (again excluding the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt) nearly 1,000 dwelling units ranked as overcrowded, and nearly 2,000 residents lived in families receiving Aid for Dependent Children grants.\textsuperscript{62} For some, Seattle proved not to be such a different place after all, leading one man who had come in the 1950s to dryly conclude that in comparison to Louisiana, Seattle simply had more fir trees.\textsuperscript{63}

My bedroom and the back gate of my house lay right on the doorstep to this leveraged concentration of African Americans, and to the living conditions, social pressures, and responses it entailed. Not that I knew any of this as a kid. Kids know what is in front of them, not what is going on behind the scenes. When I played at my friend’s house on the corner of 34\textsuperscript{th} and Union I didn’t think much about the fact that he was one of six kids living in a four-bedroom house, that his Mom washed dishes at the nursing home across

\textsuperscript{60} Hanawalt, \textit{The History of Desegregation}, 15.

\textsuperscript{61} Madrona Community Study Committee, Madrona Presbyterian Church, and United Good Neighbor Fund, Planning Division, \textit{Madrona Community Study for Madrona Community Presbyterian Church} (Seattle: Planning Division, United Good Neighbors, 1963), 11; Cliff Hooper, \textit{The Neighborhood} (Seattle: Harrison Madrona Center, 1974).

\textsuperscript{62} United Good Neighbor Fund, \textit{The Leschi and 3-M Areas}, 3–4.

\textsuperscript{63} Hooper, \textit{The Neighborhood}, 95.
the street, or that his Dad, whom I cannot recall having ever seen, was a sergeant in the Army. As we jumped wildly off the two porches in a yard of dirt and weeds or chased each other in tag screaming to get away from the Dookie Man, it only struck me as sad that the African American boy who lived right next door, whose Dad worked at Boeing, was rarely allowed to play with us, and remained mostly inside the house, or, when outside, in the confines of a white picket fence lined by immaculate flower beds.

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The *ultima Thule* of my existence at tricycle age (AKA before starting school) was Lin’s, the small grocery next to the bus stop at 34th and Cherry. The lure, of course, was candy, and I always went there with friends, their siblings, or my siblings. One block north from our 34th and James hangout, if we went down 34th we had to pass the small apartment building and then past a building in faux-brick tarpaper that housed a few apartments and a dry cleaners. Both 34th and Cherry had to be crossed at the four-way stop to reach Lin’s, and it is here I must pause to admit something. It was only in crossing Cherry that I officially entered Madrona, at least as defined by the city of Seattle. Technically, my house lay in Leschi, but by reason cliff and bluff, it was all Madrona. I certainly did not know or care as I pored over the shelf at Lin’s of Jolly Ranchers, Double Bubble, and licorice vines, red or black, which were the cheap selections below the more expensive candies ranged on the shelf just above, such as Big Hunk, Neccos, and Candy Cigarettes.

Lin’s was run by Mrs. Chin, who lived on Beacon Hill, and perched vigilantly on a stool near the cash register, often speaking on the telephone in Chinese, sometimes with loud Chinese music playing throughout the store, but always attentive to the jingling bell on the shop door when it opened or closed.

“Madrona Cleaners,” Seattle, WA, 2011 © Anna-Mária Vág. The tar-paper sheathing in this 2011 photo of the apartment building at the corner of 34th and Cherry the same as in the 1960s.
Sometimes her boys were also in the store with her. When we first moved in, there was also a corner store that had an old-fashioned soda fountain that had first opened on the location in the late 1930s. My Mom took us there only once, and never again, as the proprietor seemed absolutely clueless about how to make the fountain drinks. A lingering vestige of a previous Madrona, it was closed and gone before I was of any age to remember it for myself.

My Personal Neighborhood Expands: Madrona School

Kindergarten at Madrona School, even if only half a day—or maybe because it was half a day—started a remix of the neighborhood friendship marbles. Some of my friends attended the afternoon session while I went to the morning session. What this meant on the one hand was fewer opportunities to play together in the neighborhood on a school day; on the other hand, it also meant making better friends with different kids close by, and, because Madrona drew kids from the entire neighborhood, making more friends with kids from further afield. Through kindergarten, first and second grades, and with the initial transportation help of our parents, I made friends on 36th, 31st, and even 27th. I also made better friends with one of the girls my age that lived on 34th. Her parents were active in the PTA, as was my Mom, and such shared parental agency may have abetted this as well as some other new friendships. For instance, of the early friends on 36th Avenue, three of the Dads were UW professors, two of them even in the School of Medicine where my own Dad worked, and, because of the distances involved to their houses, parents were necessarily involved. These calendared play dates involving parental mediation were different in nature than the play and just messing around with Bradley and kids on 34th. Lacking spontaneity, and usually indoors, they sometimes seemed kind of weird, as though they were just chances to check out someone else’s toys. I remember one of these dates on 36th and playing with a miniature landscape where you tried to tap a miniature golf ball with a miniature golf club. The toy was more interesting than the time spent with the boy. I recall he came to our house once on a play date and it was about as inspiring, no doubt for him as well as me. The one thing that really excited me about a play date at their house was their car—it was black and kind of rounded, and the doors opened up from the middle out—which I witnessed in action when we stopped at Brenner Brothers’ Bakery, one of the few older businesses still on Cherry.
I did make one friend on 36th where our time spent together seemed much less constrained by the play date model. Although our Moms at first dropped us off and picked us up at our respective houses, by first grade we were both able to navigate the route by foot on our own. Oddly, a straight line from my house to her house would have been less than a block. However, the streets, impenetrable bluff, and dead ends being what they were, to walk there actually meant a four block walk the short way and an eight block walk the other way. You can guess which one I took: the short one, north up 35th to Cherry, east down Cherry’s vertiginous drop, then backtracking south, probably two blocks—it’s hard to say, because the street curved around and there were no cross streets. We, the two tiniest children in our first-grade class, wrote and put on two-person plays for the class, and when we met at each other’s houses, unlike the other play dates, confronted with boring toys, and with me wondering when it would all be over, we fashioned clothes for trolls, drew, made stories, watched Batman, or played in her family’s terraced and woodsy backyard. When I played with the friends on 27th and 31st, walking to their homes after school, what I remember most were not their houses or yards but the adventurous routes we would take and roaming around at will.

Combined with my previous friends closer to home, this widened circle of acquaintance reflected the makeup of Madrona: Black, White and Asian American. Between 1957 and 1962, the school’s demographics had reflected the neighborhood’s intensifying residential shift: moving from thirty percent to fifteen percent White, with Black enrollment rising to nearly eighty percent as other non-White enrollment dropped from 8 percent to nearly five percent.64 In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the parents of the PTA Board were a mix of Blacks, Whites, and Asian Americans who lived on all points of the compass from Madrona School itself.65 Board meetings were held on a rotating basis at members’ homes, and the board not only engaged in typical PTA fare such as fund-raising, but clamored for a preschool program, as well as a Seattle Disadvantaged Pupil Program,

64. Schmid, Growth and Distribution, 46, 48.
demanded action regarding a textbook at Madrona with the n-word in it, questioned the rationale for consigning so many Madrona students to the Special Education program, and in 1962 hosted a Madrona International Festival. This diverse group included Japanese Americans interned during World War Two, a Concentration Camp survivor, and families supported by careers such as accounting, architecture, engineering, ministering, and university teaching. If the Madrona neighborhood was truly divided into two parts, east of 35th and west of 34th, somebody evidently forgot to tell this particular group of people, because the parents in this coalition, collaborative social activists to the core, went great lengths to try and establish a common and solid educational experience for all children in the neighborhood.

The citywide school boycott just before Spring break of first grade was a case in point. The unnatural strictures on housing had created direct fallout in Central Area schools, including Madrona. Though Seattle schools were not segregated by law or ordinance, they were segregated de facto, with negative impacts on the educational experience and quality of learning for students. One issue was as simple as overcrowding. Mann, the grade school across from Garfield, was the most crowded school in the city in 1964, and most of its small play area had been swallowed up by ten portables. Leschi was also overcrowded that year and continued to gain students. But it was more than just overcrowding. Several years earlier a committee of Seattle school Principals had identified schools where teachers and staff were coping with serious social problems. Some common factors shared by these schools were low socio-economic levels, sub-standard housing, and high absenteeism, suspensions, minority enrollments, and numbers of families receiving Aid for Dependent Children support. Eight of the thirteen identified schools were in the Central Area, and high Black enrollments in elementary schools in 1962 were clear for all to see: Mann 94.3 percent, Leschi 88.9 percent, Harrison 83.4 percent, Minor 80.1 percent, Madrona 79.4 percent, and Colman 76.9 percent. By contrast, only two elementary schools north of the Lake Washington Ship Canal had African American enrollments of 1 percent or higher. School District variances also abetted the housing patterns. At the northeast edge of the Central Area, there was one conspicuously White school,
McGilvra, and when space allowed, the School District allowed students to transfer from other Central Area schools. The students who did so were typically White, increasing the minority concentrations in the other schools even further.

The intensifying problems in Central Area schools in the early 1960s did not go unnoticed by parents, PTAs, or organizations such as United Good Neighbors, the Urban League, or civil rights groups such as the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). These groups and various church groups throughout the city made various efforts to draw attention and action from the School District. One approach to redress was to solicit greater financial support for the segregated schools in an attempt to raise educational attainment to the standards prevailing through most of the city’s schools. This fiscal ask challenged the traditional model for the allotments of funds, flatly based per student across the city, and received not only bureaucratic resistance to change, but public laments that no special funds or treatment should be accorded to any one group or group of schools in the city. Eventually, the old funding model was abandoned, and some special compensatory allotments were made. Another direction for improving education was advocacy for a voluntary transfer program. The school district favored this transfer program by allowing transfers when space allowed but did not favor it highly enough to provide the needed money for transportation. Such funding was eventually provided by the state, and by 1963, 247 students voluntarily transferred to other schools. It was mostly one-directional, however, as 239 of those students were Black, transferring out of the Central Area, while only eight students (seven of them White) transferred into the Central Area, all going to Garfield. That the transferring was done mostly by Black students did not go unnoticed by parents in the Central Area, who also noticed that the volunteers were often the best students, whose absence from their original schools contributed even further to the challenges posed at the schools they had left. Another approach, favored by the groups whose leadership lay with local churches, was to propose solving the problem by closing schools like Mann and bussing all the students to predominantly White schools. None of the approaches made much headway, and certainly none offered anything like a model of consensus for the proponents.

The one thing all groups agreed on, though, was redressing the root cause of the school issues: discriminatory housing practices. An Open Housing Ordinance was finally put to a public ballot by the Seattle City Council in March of 1964, and though the outcome was

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a nearly two-to-one loss, the entire issue was contested at length in public venues, with opponents viewing it as “forced housing” legislation and proponents seeing it as an avenue towards basic fairness. Various parties concerned with the poor and deteriorating state of the schools in the Central Area saw this legislation as a potential key to reducing critical stressors on the schools, and publicly lobbied the School District to endorse the Ordinance. The School District balked, again letting itself be perceived as a reluctant and not entirely trustworthy ally in the effort to bring Central Area schools up to a par with the rest of the city’s schools.

In 1966, faced with a growing sense that the School District was dragging its feet in fixing the educational problems, several groups, including CORE, the NAACP, and the Central Area Civil Rights Committee, proposed a city-wide school boycott to bring public pressure to bear on the issue of segregation in Seattle schools. With the boycott approaching, the co-chairs of the Madrona PTA were among the over two hundred people who attended an open School Board meeting that was being picketed outside by civil rights groups. Their purpose was to gather information to help Madrona parents decide whether to participate in the boycott or not. When their turn came, the co-chairs asked the Superintendent what the District was doing to reduce overcrowding and segregation at Madrona, and what the District’s plans for the future were. The Superintendent’s less than satisfying answers, including the suggestion that the underlying issues were not a School District problem, were undercut even further by a Board member from Ballard who remarked that the “pill” might be the best solution for overcrowding at Madrona. The PTA, not surprisingly in light of such responses, endorsed the boycott. One of those co-chairs, by the way, was my Mom. 73

The two-day boycott took place the Thursday and Friday before Spring break. Organizers did all they could to keep it from seeming like just two days off for the students and a gross imposition on parents. The organizers set up alternative educational venues for the boycott days called Freedom Schools. Although the Church Council of Greater Seattle had withheld its endorsement after the voicing of strong objections by several representatives, many individual churches still provided spaces for the schools. Central Area attendance at the schools was so heavy (over 3,000 students each day) that more churches were asked to provide space on the spur of the moment. 74

73. Pieroth, Desegregating the Public Schools, 261–63.
74. Pieroth, Desegregating the Public Schools, 250–291.
For personal context, that was the year I was learning to tie my shoes, and a few weeks before the earthquake that rattled some bricks off our house. And it is only through the strangest of quirks that I even remember attending a Freedom School. The memory has nothing to do with my Mom addressing the School Board (which I didn’t learn about until 2018), the political behind-the-scenes action, or the public stridency as just recounted. In fact, I might have forgotten all about the boycott if I had not as a young adult walked by a two-story wooden church near 13th and Spring Street. The building’s square tower rang a bell—figuratively, that is—and I knew I had been in there. I stood there and tried to figure it out. A few random bits and pieces floated back to me as I stood in my tracks and stared at the building. I had been on the second-floor platform of that square tower, looking down. Beyond that I remembered that there were some old games and toys, poor lighting, a certain amount of disorganization between the curb and the main entry, and a lot of kids. While the organizers endeavored to teach African American history during those days, those lessons have been reserved for older kids at other locations. The only other thing I personally remember about the boycott is that Bradley’s parents did not let him go to the Freedom School, and that he and one Black classmate from 33rd were the only kids who were in his class on those days.

First grade at Madrona, unlike Kindergarten, expanded my neighborhood in a way that Kindergarten never had. As with trips to the Madrona Pharmacy and the IGA grocery at 34th and Union, I had not arrived at Kindergarten on my own, but traveled there either on the bench seat of the green and brown station wagon or of the light blue Dodge, with my Mom at the wheel. The spaces between opening the car door and clambering in and closing the car door after clambering back out had only the faintest existence. This suggests another provisional definition of neighborhood: the places a kid can and does get to on foot.

By this definition, my neighborhood exponentially expanded in first grade, when I started walking to school on my own. My mom prescribed every detail of the route. For the first week she even walked with me. Out the front door, left on James to 34th, then to the four-way stop at Cherry, where both streets widened to accommodate more traffic and the electric trolleys. We stayed to the right side of the street, and only crossed at Marion, the peak of two inclines on 34th that let us clearly see any cars coming up from either rise. We then continued down 34th, parallel to the playfield, turned left at Spring, walking beside the swings and tennis court, crossed to the school block at 33rd, and proceeded to the double doors of the main entrance of the sleek new addition near Union. Needless
to say, my Mom was adamant about crossing only at corners, and insisted on careful scrutiny of any traffic before doing so. Not surprisingly, the first day I walked on my own, I did not use the crosswalk at Marion, but cut a long diagonal half a block below. Next thing I knew, my Mom had cruised up alongside me in the rounded Dodge. She made me get in the car, drove me back to 34th and Cherry and had me restart the walk from that point on, this time following me the entire way.

So far as I know I stayed fairly true to that route for most of first grade, although I must have started using the entrance at the back of the old building, because it was there where I got into trouble for dipping my gloves in a puddle and gleefully splashing kids as they came through the entrance. It seemed to me that it was all great fun, with kids squealing and laughing, but I was assured by the adult authority that this was not appropriate, and that the dirty puddle water might have stained kids’ clothes, which could easily get them into trouble at home. As a child eternally clad in lackluster clothes that served for home as well as school this struck me as a bit of an alien concept. But I saw it in action again in third grade, for when I went to a friend’s house on 23rd after school, the first thing he did before we went out to play outside was change his clothes.

The walks on this new terrain to and from Madrona School were full of joy. 34th was a bright street with few trees and I loved running my hand along surfaces found on the way, chain-link fences, cinder-block walls, overhanging branches, and I touched and prodded the amazing orange flowers in one yard that were open during the morning walk but shut tight on the walk home. The plants had roots like tiny carrots, but I was pretty sure they were not carrots and did not dare to eat one. In first and second grades, I often walked home with friends who were in my class, especially one girl who lived on 34th and another who lived on 36th. One of our greatest joys was putting our ears on the telephone poles to see if we could hear the 12 E. Cherry bus coming down 34th before we could see it. (I know, too, that we sometimes crossed the street diagonally to compare notes when listening to a pole on opposite sides.) I also went straight to the girl’s house on 34th one day and was having such fun that I didn’t realize I hadn’t told my Mom. For whatever reason—call it kid logic if you will—my friend and I decided that it would be best if I hid in her older sister’s closet when, around 5 p.m., my Mom showed up at the front door. My Mom was relieved just to know where I was, and as I extracted myself from behind the dresses in the closet, she explained that she had been more worried than angry. There was no punishment, just the admonition to always come home first, and let her know where I was going.

It was not just the route to school that was new terrain to me. Kindergarten had been pretty much a one-room affair, somewhere on the eastern edge of the school, about
mid-building. My first-grade class, though, was on the west side of the new addition, its door near the staircase on 32\textsuperscript{nd} and Union that dropped right down to the small, early-grades playground. This new playground had a small jungle gym and a tether ball pole that was great for climbing, and next to it was the new covered play court that provided extra fresh air, run-around room on rainy days. As first graders, we spent most of our time in the new classroom and the new play areas, and only ventured into the looming older building with the wide, echoing stairs to visit the library on the second floor. It wasn’t until second grade that our rambunctious energies were let loose on the ten-times larger playground on the other side of the old building.

First grade was the greatest grade ever. Educationally, about all I remember is sitting in a circle trying to read \textit{Dick and Jane} books aloud and identifying the names of shapes cut out of felt cloth. What I remember much more is climbing and running on the playground, laughing a lot in class with the kids and the teacher, and the trip to the zoo near the end of the year, where my friends Garrett and Dwayne and I tried to figure out how to sneak in at night and live on Monkey Island with the monkeys happily ever after.

There was one fly in the ointment that year, and it had nothing to do with my class. It happened one day on the way home. I don’t know if I had started on the way home with any friends and if one or more of them had gone on ahead without me, but I do know that I had stopped to play on the empty swing set, just inside the chain-link fence at the corner of Madrona playfield. I only had to hop up the few steps from the gateless entrance on 34\textsuperscript{th} to get there. Again, I have no idea how long I had been happily swinging away, but at some point, an older and taller girl, followed by an even older, taller boy, had spotted me through the fence, come up the steps, and walked straight toward me. The girl stopped just short of where my feet might have struck her and shouted, “Get off my swing, White boy!” I was surprised for any number of reasons. I was also unsure of what to do. I answered that it was not \textit{her} swing. A logical answer, to be sure, but perhaps not the best one. The taller boy moved closer to her as she repeated her demand more shrilly.

“I \textit{said} get off my swing, White boy!”

“But it is not \textit{your} swing” I said again.

“Don’t get smart with me!” She yelled, put one foot forward, then timed her slap as I swung forward to get me right across the cheek. I tumbled off the swing and could feel my cheek so hot and started crying as she and the older boy moved in closer. I am not sure what would have happened next, but it was my good luck that a sixth grader heard the noise and had come up the steps to confront the pair. It was my extra good luck that
it was not just any sixth grader but the son of the light-heavyweight boxing champion, Eddie Cotton. This was something that I knew and that both of them knew as well. As they skulked sullenly off toward 33rd, Michael Cotton came over to me, asked me if I was all right, then watched to be sure I was safely on my homeward path down 34th.

The stings were multiple and even at the time it was hard to sort them out. The humiliation of being yelled at was one of them. Being told to do something by a total stranger for no good reason was another. And then there was the shock of the slap itself. But perhaps worst of all was how this opportunistic exertion of power conditioned me to sense my own vulnerability. As a first grader, I was as small as many preschoolers, and if Michael Cotton had not stepped in, with nobody else around, these two bigger kids could have done just about anything they wanted to me. And lastly, there was the weird epithet that somehow seemed to justify the rest of their actions. I could not tell if I had been picked on because I was small and all alone on a park swing, or small, all alone on a park swing, and White. I seemed to have become just a set of categories, and though I had often felt how small I was, this was the first time I was made acutely conscious of being a White boy.

I told my parents of course and my Mom and I went soon after to meet with the Principal, Mr. Caldwell. He was concerned and sympathetic and with the help of class photos I identified both aggressors. The girl was a third grader, and the boy was her older brother. The Principal seemed anything but surprised when I pointed them out, and he promised to talk to them both. Whether he did or not, it would be a long time, if ever, before I would stop to play on those swings by myself.

In first grade, Madrona School, between 32nd and 33rd, with its farthest wall lying on Union, became the northern limit of my personal neighborhood. I had made one friend who lived farther north on 35th where it horseshoed into 36th and another friend who lived farther west on Union, but as visits to their homes always ended in a parent pick-up or drop-off, their houses did not meet the provisional definition of a neighborhood as consisting of places you could and did walk to. While the southern terminus still lay at the dead ends of 34th and 35th, the eastward bound expanded to include Madrona Beach where my classmate from 36th and I took swimming lessons right after first grade ended. I would walk to her house, her Mom would walk with both of us down a long staircase and then streets, one of which was so steep it had been built with narrow concrete strips for better gripping. It was one of those very drizzly early summers, and we learned how to face-float, back-float and dog paddle in the rain. Afterwards, her Mom would walk back up with us and make us toasted peanut butter and jam sandwiches and soup to warm up.
It hardly seemed possible, but second grade was even more fun than first. Or maybe I just remember more of it. Most of the kids from my first-grade class had moved together with me into the same second-grade class, with the addition of a new boy, Gilbert, who liked to run around on the playground just as much as me and my other best buddies. The classroom was on the 33rd side of the new building and if you went tippy toes at the windows you could look right down at the fire station. The word “north” was posted high at the front of the room, “east” was on the wall to the right as I faced forward from my desk, “west” adorned the wall to the left, and “south” sat at the back of the room. Even now, when I have trouble trying to figure out which direction I am looking, I imagine myself sitting at my desk in that room, picturing my house to the south, the lake to the east, and the wall at the front as true north.

The teacher was the real key to how much fun we had and how much we learned that year. Mrs. Harris was a good-humored, creative and engaging, Black teacher who lived in Madrona, in fact, very near my house, at 32nd and James, and she even invited me to visit once or twice, where I played with my Gumby and Pokey figures and twirled toys for her seal-point Siamese cat while she and my Mom talked about this, that, and the other. In the classroom, Mrs. Harris was a wondrous dynamo. She arranged to have a series of pets in the room, I remember an indigo snake, and for another period we cared for a kinkajou. The most fun math exercise of all time was a daily count of everybody’s pocket change (in most cases lunch money) and Mrs. Harris would write the amounts neatly on the board while the students wrote the figures (less neatly no doubt) at their desks, and then added the numbers to try to get the correct total. Whoever reached the correct total first received the prize of being a hall monitor, or bathroom monitor, or some other rotating role. Mrs. Harris could even turn the limits to her tolerance into a positive: one day she grew so frustrated with the ceaseless jabber of myself and the otherbig jabberer in the class that she offered to pay us five dollars if we could just stay quiet for the rest of the day. I was out of the running in

Author’s 2nd grade class. Photo in author’s possession.
less than an hour, while Rhamelle triumphed over herself for the rest of the day and won the money. Black, White, and Asian American, nobody cared—the class just loved to have fun, and Mrs. Harris was incredibly skilled at getting the cooperation of everybody and did so without the appearance of any effort at all. When I broke my foot just before Halloween, she encouraged everybody to sign my walking cast in pens and pencils of all colors and even the cast managed to become a thing of joy.

It was in second grade that my friend and I started walking to my house for lunch on Tuesdays, where we would have our favorite lunch set out for us—split pea soup (out of the Campbell’s can, but made with milk) and a salad with sliced lettuce, cottage cheese and pear slices (also straight out of the can). The lunch was set out by Miss Fleet, the Black cleaning lady who for many years had come to our house one day a week. Skinny as a pencil, hard-working, and kind, she always looked forward to my friend coming home with me and she always made sure we finished and set out to get back to school in time. These lunches are just one example of how she always seemed to look out for me. That same year, when I couldn’t go trick or treating in the rain because of my cast, she invited me for hot cocoa at the duplex apartment on 34th and Spring. The year before that she had bought me one of my favorite toys ever—a monkey that beat a tin drum and lit up as it did so—exactly the kind of battery-operated toy my parents were set dead against. I had seen it in a store window below her previous apartment at 23rd and Union and she had taken note of how much I had liked it and had given it to me for my birthday.

For part of that year, I was also excused from Mrs. Harris’s class twice a week, for the school had identified an issue with my speech. I say the school for lack of better knowledge because I have no idea if it was the recommendation of Mrs. Harris or a visiting specialist, or some combination of the two. It certainly didn’t take a specialist to notice it. For the life of me, I could not produce an “r” that didn’t sound like a “w.” In the second grade, then, not only was I incredibly small, but my speech made me sound like a preschooler.

I had mixed feelings about the speech therapy sessions. On the positive side, it was exciting to leave the regular class at an appointed time while everybody else was still back in the room. It was also exciting because of where the sessions were held. In the old building, behind a door at the top of the dark, third floor stairwell that was usually cordoned off with a thick rope chain. Getting out of class and climbing up to this mysterious place was energizing.

The sessions themselves were not. The windowless room, perhaps once a broom closet, had been repurposed for the speech consultant. It was lucky to hold three chairs, a small
table, and a portable blackboard tilted on an easel. The therapist was kindly enough, but she sure had her work cut out for her. Trying to get other people’s tongues, lips and teeth to do new tricks is by no means simple. The learners might have a guess as to what sound is wanted, and their ears might sometimes even recognize it, but stabilizing that tenuous knowledge in the body parts that produce speech asks a lot emotionally of the learners who in spite of having much at stake really cannot grasp the problem. There is something innately personal about speech, and even a second grader knows it. I have no idea how many times I recited the following sentence aloud, but it must have been a lot, because I remember it to this day: the red rabbit ran down the windy red road.

If my own struggles and incomprehension were not difficult enough, the therapist always met with students in pairs. We were told to work with each other, and help each other watch, hear and say the expected sounds. This might have made more sense if the other students had troubles with their R’s and W’s. But they didn’t. And thinking back about the other students with whom I was paired, I now remember something else. They were all Black. One girl had trouble with words that had both “th” and “s”—her version of my “r” and “w” problem. For the life of me, though, as we sat there and repeated our therapeutic sentences to each other, I couldn’t understand why she always said “thith” instead of “this” or why her tongue was where it was in her mouth when she did so. She was just as uncomprehending of my trouble in saying the rabbit sentence correctly. Another girl and one boy I remember had particular trouble with the word “asked” which invariably came out as “axed.” I knew and heard tons of kids at Madrona who said asked like axed, and so far as I knew, they weren’t in the little cubicle at the top of the staircase. With this experience in mind, it was no surprise to learn some fifty years later that a 1961 report on Madrona found the high percentage of Black students referred for speech therapy to be very troubling.⁷⁵

Of course, in 1961 the report used the term in current usage, Negro, and not Black. But that usage itself started to shift while I was in second grade, spurred on greatly after the Seattle visit of Stokely Carmichael, who was making a splash on the national scene with his advocacy of a more militant approach to civil rights activism and his signature term of Black Power. He even spoke at Garfield High School—after much public and legal outcry—but I was not among the 4,000 people in attendance. More likely, at seven years old, I was home asleep in bed. Carmichael gave only one press interview during that visit, ⁷⁵ Madrona Community Study Committee, *Madrona Community Study for Madrona Community Presbyterian Church*, 13.
though, answering questions posed by two Madrona sixth graders. I didn’t know Stokely—except the name was really cool, as were the hair and sunglasses, and before long some of my classmates’ hair, which had been meticulously shaved very close to the scalp before, started rising modestly a few centimeters from their skulls.

The summer after second grade, I even went to a Black History class, not offered at Madrona, but farther north at Harrison Elementary. I am pretty sure I only went once, and I don’t remember how I got there or why I even went. What I do remember is walking home, feeling very alone and ashamed, even though I was not alone but with my brother or my sister, I am not sure which. I had just sat through what seemed like an endless presentation during which I kept wondering if I was even in the right classroom because the teacher was going on about houses in Africa and how they were built and drew pictures of villages and paths between villages, with me keeping silent, and still wondering if I was even in the right class. Towards the end the teacher tried to draw me into the discussion, and I bashfully replied that I didn’t know what to say, because I was here for the Black History class and not a class about Africa. The room erupted in howls of laughter and the teacher tried her hardest not to smile, assuring me, “But dear, you are in the Black History class.” As I left Harrison to go home, I still felt incredibly stupid and belittled and really couldn’t understand why what I said had been so funny. Perhaps if the term “African American” had already gained currency I would have made the connection. Whichever sibling was with me offered no solace but chastised me instead. “Why did you have to say something? You should have just kept quiet.” On top of all that I now had to walk uphill, the steep, sharp curve where Denny wound its way up from 32nd to 34th, and ever after for me it was a heartless street because it was so steep and because I felt so alone and vulnerable. Sometimes I have nightmares about this steep, double curve with its big, shadowy trees.

Although the first three years at Madrona had widened the social and physical extents of my personal neighborhood, I still spent most of my time playing on 34th and 35th between the two dead ends and Cherry. 34th and James with its plethora of kids was as ever a prime spot for play. It even lent itself to semi-organized sports, for the double lot directly behind our garage with its stumps and languishing fruit trees had enough grass for playing tackle football, and the wide manhole cover on the southeast corner of the intersection made a perfect home plate for softball. The best athlete on the block was the next-to-oldest sister of one friend and she regularly blasted the softball up into the vacant lot at the top of the stairs, causing delays as we sought to recover the ball from the thistles and

76. Pieroth, Desegregating the Public Schools, 333.
blackberries. Whatever team she played on was almost sure to win because she was also the best pitcher. Because of the confluence of dead ends, games were only occasionally interrupted by the early warning system of one kid crying out, “car!” with everyone else then chiming in as we all slid off the street like quicksilver.

Our loud softball games drew down Desmond, a kid from the next block on 34th, and it was about this time that a smaller band of neighborhood friends started to solidify: the band became my brother and myself, Bradley from 35th, J.J. and Ty, the two youngest brothers in a family of five who had recently moved into onto 34th, and Desmond from the next block up. J.J. was the same age as my brother and Bradley, Desmond was one year behind them, while Ty and I were the same age, and as the two youngest and two smallest, we were always scrambling to keep up with the others. My first neighborhood friend, of butter and brown sugar sandwich fame, was not part of this close band, and neither was another early friend, Michael, who still showed up now and then, but no longer lived full-time with his grandmother.

Our small core of friends played on 34th, but also in our house and our front lawn under the Madrona tree. We also spent hours hanging out on the curved metal bars that the city had placed atop the bluff at the end of 35th. The bars were just the right height for leaning against, climbing on, and doing pullovers. It was a great place to just mess around while coming up with things to do such as play hide-and-go-seek. They were also a great place for casually watching the comings and goings of the neighbors, such as the admiral’s adopted daughters with their long hair and steady stream of boyfriends. Both girls knew all of us by name and sometimes let us hang out with them, swinging us by the arms over their lawn and taking a moment here and there to enjoy a regression to childhood. The athletic older teens in the other brick house often did the same, and while playing catch on the street with them, we learned how Mr. Thackery had taken their footballs, too. They also told us about Mr. Artis, who lived below the cliff on 35th, and how they used to take mirrors and shine light into his family’s eyes at dinnertime. That summer after second grade, though, the traffic to Rhinehart’s house had fallen all but silent. After a sequence of failed appeals, he had started serving his sentence at Walla Walla. A middle-aged woman was now the lone occupant of the gigantic house, and one of her visible tasks was to let Rhinehart’s tiny pug in and out. The pug, named Tiger, often joined us at the bars. Mucousy, bug-eyed, and friendly like most pugs, Tiger some days provided the extra entertainment of grabbing one of our legs and humping away, always a cause for laughter.

77. Atkins, Gay Seattle, 102.
Having discovered during hide-and-go-seek a precarious trail that linked the bluff on 35th to the dead end on 34th, Bradley and I one day decided to explore that area further. As we forced our way loudly through the tangled undergrowth beneath the jutting concrete platforms on 34th, a man abruptly yelled at us from below. Rather than stick around to find out who it was, we scrambled uphill and hoisted ourselves onto the nearest concrete platform. As all the yelling had stopped, we calmly walked out of the tall scotch broom toward the paved street. A car then screeched to a halt in front of us, and two men jumped out. “You grab that one!” shouted the older of the two, pointing at me. “I’ll get this one!” Get and grab they did, quite forcefully at first, as the older man hissed: “We’re going to hold you until the police get here.” Though he didn’t tell us his name we recognized him as Mr. Artis, the African American homeowner who lived in the house below the bluff. The younger one was his teenage son. As Mr. Artis calmed down and while we all waited for the police, he demanded to know our names and where we lived, explaining how he’d had troubles with people trespassing before. Though the pair had at least stopped man-handling us, I began to understand why the older kids had taken such delight in shining mirrors in his eyes at dinnertime. The police eventually arrived, spoke with all of us, explained to Bradley and me that we should not go down there, kicked the dirt and left. I don’t think either of us told our parents about this—since it did involve the police—and maybe we had been trespassing. Most disturbing about it, though, was the threatening way they had grabbed us. I was seven years old and Bradley, nine. The episode weirdly echoed the previous year’s slap at the swing. And as with the slap, it certainly did not contribute to a good sense of security.

It was during second grade, too, that I gained a new means for moving through my expanded neighborhood. After many frustrating false starts and a lot of tears and shame, I had finally mastered the essentials of riding a bike. When the breakthrough finally came, I rode around in circles, learning every crack and bump in the oval loop formed by the sidewalk from James to the dead end, until my parents finally had to call me in at dark. With my brother and sister, I could now explore more of 35th, riding on the flat as far as St. Theresa’s at Marion, and once I even rode with them on a rare excursion south of the dead ends, rolling down 32nd to ride in circles on the Leschi playground.

When riding by myself I usually stayed within a block of home—whether by choice or parental injunction I do not know. Even then, the results were not always good. One day, as I waited for my friend from 36th to walk up the steep span of Cherry I indulged in some showing off of my newfound skills, making small loops in the street at the top of the hill, with each loop a little longer and deeper down the slope, before turning the handlebars to sweep gracefully back uphill. Sadly for me, my skills were not what I thought. On one
My Personal Neighborhood Expands: Madrona School

Downward arc my feet lost contact with the pedals and they instantly spun out of control as the bike sped unimpeded down the hill. I remember three things about that ride downhill: a blue car that looked huge coming up the hill towards me; after dodging the car and crossing 36th, the guard rail at 37th suddenly looming as large as the car had; and in a moment of lucid reasoning, the realization that if I did not want to fly headfirst over the guardrail, I had to lean over hard and just dump myself onto the ground. Which is what I did. I started crying when I landed, but stopped, because as I stood up, I realized I didn’t feel that bad. It was then I became unglued. Blood poured into my eyes, and I was terrified that my brain was going to pour out of my head next. All the way home, I alternated screams of “Brain Damage!” with wordless wailing at the top of my lungs. The man driving the car had parked at the crest of the hill and came down to help me. My friend told him where I lived, and we headed up to 35th. As I passed down the block to my house, still screaming, more friends from as far as 34th came out and followed me as I wailed and walked along with blood streaming from my forehead and chin. The crash is what I remember, but my friends and even their parents recounted the baleful parade for years, not to mention decades, afterward. My Mom was too unnerved to drive me, so my friend’s Mom took me to the doctor instead. As he sewed five stitches in my chin and seven in my forehead, Dr. Pine assured me there was no brain damage.

Strangely, that doleful parade down 35th is one of the very last times I can picture my friends from 36th, 35th, and 34th all being together at the same time. In part, this may have been influenced by our redistribution in classrooms at the start of third grade. But more likely it was due to the fact that my very best friend from 36th was a girl, and my friends on 34th, who were mostly older, and boys, had started to make fun of me for this. The last time I remember her visiting on 35th and playing with me and my other friends I distinctly recall that as we walked down the middle of the street together I started to write letters in pee as I walked. That is not exactly like drawing a line in the sand, but about as close as you can get.

About this same time, I noticed myself really enjoying the time I spent alone at home. The summer between second and third grade I could not get enough of jigsaw puzzles. Sitting at a low table near an upstairs window, with stellar jays, robins and smaller birds visiting the branches of the vast Madrona tree in our front yard, I spent hours putting them together, pulling them apart, and putting them together again. My two favorite puzzles were both round. One had the constellations of the zodiac in a circular riot of mythical beasts and gods, and the other featured various songbirds, each bird portrayed in the kind of tree or bush where it might be found. The images of this puzzle offered a palpable continuity with the Madrona tree, lawn, and birds outside the window as I
worked. Sometimes I listened to music on the radio, but mostly I let the daytime quiet of the neighborhood serve as an acoustic backdrop: a car pulling away here, a front door closing there, the occasional quack of the duck next door. Sometimes it seemed so quiet you could almost hear a cloud moving overhead or the landing of a crisp Madrona leaf on the lawn after its long drop from the crown of the tree. About this same summer, too, in the unoccupied bedroom at the front of the house nearest the Madrona tree, I started typing up stories on the Royal typewriter with the Pica type that permanently lived there. Though not a big reader, I really liked to make up adventures about monsters and creatures from outer space that were a lot like the movies I loved to watch on our small black and white TV.

The annual sorting of student marbles for third grade isolated me from my best play buddies from first and second grade. Stranger yet, my class was not even in the main school building where their new classrooms were, but in one of many wooden portables that had landed on the upper playground over the summer to keep pace with continually increasing number of students. Two rows of portables had swallowed up a good third of the vast blacktop surface, though at least the loss was made up in part by new play structures near the swings across the street. So at recess and lunchtime each day, I sought out my old buddies there, where we flew across the new monkey bars, played king of the mountain on a cargo-net pyramid, and perhaps best of all, dug tunnels in the deep pool of pristine sand beneath the net. For all that, it was still not the same as being in class with them the whole day.

I might have chosen a better new friend to fill the void. But that is not how it worked out. How Freddie and I became friends I don’t recall. It wasn’t because we played together at lunch with my other friends, which we did not, because he lived so close to school that he always went home for the entire lunch period. Maybe it was something as simple as the teacher arranging us alphabetically by name or the longstanding friendship of our two older brothers. And really, the choice of friend might not have mattered at all in a classroom with a different teacher. Mrs. Harris, for instance, always brought out the best in kids, and she’d had no particular issues with Freddie the year before. For whatever reason, however, bringing out the best in kids was not a strength for our third-grade teacher. In the case of Freddie and me, it proved a real weakness. I imagine it was offenses like talking when we weren’t supposed to, or pressing crayons against the iron boiler until the portable stank, or generally fooling around when we shouldn’t be, but one day when we had piqued her frustration yet again, she tried a new solution: she banished us. The
portable had a door and porch at either end, and she consigned each of us to one of these. Because the porches faced only the porches of other portables, which were in class at the same time, nobody knew we were there—except our teacher and the students inside our classroom. When this became a regular occurrence, inventive as ever, we soon came equipped with a ball, and started playing catch during our expulsions. I have no idea how many times we played catch without giving ourselves away, but one day an errant toss made a loud bang on the portable, and the teacher emerged and took our ball. I am not sure if we had to go right then and there, or if we went the next day, but Freddie and I were soon in the Principal’s office—it was no longer Mr. Caldwell, I think—but someone else, maybe Mr. Goetzen. I expected him to yell at us or least say something harsh. What we heard instead was a plea for understanding and a request for forbearance, for our teacher was not only new to Madrona School but having serious health difficulties. We already knew this of course because we’d had lots of substitutes that year, one of whom had sent at least five kids to the Principal’s office, including Freddie, and had also threatened to send me. And under our regular teacher’s extremely pale skin it had been impossible to miss the dark circles under her eyes that gave her a perpetually haunted look. The Principal’s plea was successful with me—after his talk, I felt sorry for her, and laid off. The plea was not so successful with Freddie. If anything, he became mouthier than ever. One day late in the year, he egged her on and on in class until she lost it altogether and slapped him across the face. The room went silent. The rest of us wondered if we had just seen what we had just seen. His parents rightfully complained, and for the rest of the year Freddie was in a different classroom. The teacher retired for health reasons in June.

Some afternoons after school, I helped Freddie on his paper route, not one of the two big dailies, but a scrawny weekly thing called The Shopping News. I became more closely acquainted with parts of Madrona north of Marion by tagging along with him, and when we were done delivering, we stopped at the Madrona Pharmacy where he would pay me in Hollywood bars. The last two times I helped him, it took far less time, with most of that being spent tagging along while he scouted for an obscure, overgrown place to ditch the bundle of papers. I still got my Hollywood bars, and he probably got paid too, but I doubt he had the route much longer.

With both of our brothers, Freddie and I went downtown twice to see movies that year. Part of the adventure was not just to go by bus, but to go by bus without paying full fare. We had a clever system that worked well—at least for the first three rides. One kid would buy an All Day Pass, and then, pretending to put it immediately in his back pocket, would let the kid behind grasp it and then present it to the driver as his own. We did not dare
keep passing it between all four of us, but we bought two passes for the purpose. We made it uneventfully downtown and found our theater near Fourth or Fifth Avenue just in time for the matinee showing of *Bonnie & Clyde*. During the opening sequence, an usher angrily flashed his light in our eyes and threatened to make us leave. As surprising and funny as Faye Dunaway’s underwear was to us, we managed to stop laughing. In December, employing the same fare maneuver, we went to the exact same theater and watched Walt Disney’s *The Jungle Book*. We made it back onto the bus at Third and Pike with our two pass trick and would have all made it home without a hitch if we had not stopped by the Wigwam store on 23rd and Union. I am not sure why we stopped there or what anybody bought, but it did mean trying our two-pass trick one more time. Freddie went first, pretended to put the pass in his back pocket, I snagged it, showed it, and proceeded to my seat. Then Freddie’s brother got on, showed the pass, and skipped quickly ahead onto the bus, too fast, and now too far away for my brother to snag the pass. My brother frantically dug into his pockets, but no money. The bus driver told him to get off. Freddie’s brother had clearly intended for the trick not to work that time. I honestly don’t know if I stayed on the bus with Freddie and his brother, or if I got off and walked with my brother down the long hill from Union to Empire and up the long hill from Union to 34th and then to our house. I would like to think I did. In any case, leaving him no chance to get the pass, and riding on without him, did not seem like the kinds of things that friends do.

Such a minor slight was nothing, though, compared to the tribulations of one of my neighbors that same month. Rhinehart, who had started serving his term at Walla Walla in July, had refused to work, claiming health reasons, and during his second stint in blackout isolation in early December, was injected with the anti-psychotic drug Stelazine twice a day, followed days later by oral doses of Stelazine and Librium.\(^78\) Whether his thirty-seven days in blackout isolation and the injections were simply administered for his refusal to work, as claimed by the prison Warden and prison Psychologist, or as punishment for his attempts to communicate with counsel or because of religious and sexual views as he claimed, no one may know.\(^79\) Man, to quote Philip Larkin, hands on misery to man ... and yes, it does deepen just like a coastal shelf. Adult Madrona neighbors were just as much in the dark as the kids were in regard to his personalized accommodations in Walla Walla that winter. We only knew that his house was still quiet, fitting around the tiny pug and the middle-aged woman like a shoe that was several sizes too large.

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Nor was our house exactly the same as it had been when we moved in six years earlier. My Dad’s voracious appetite for books and wishes for an ample writing space had materialized in a first-floor addition that was completed in 1967. The bay window of the original library gave passage to a large room that paralleled the first study and one half of the living room. New French doors now conjured light from the south, and the repositioned bay window tactfully inducted light from the east. Needless to say, all walls that were not windows or doors were shelves. The intent had been to match the original library’s woodcraft and attention to detail, but reality intruded, as the bank was skeptical about the eventual resale value of the house, given the declining neighborhood, and the loan officer demanded that plywood be used as a cost-effective material for backing the shelves. The bank also balked at the cost of a design including hardwood, parquet flooring. My Dad and the architect resisted enough of the constraints to get the addition funded and built, and even if the plywood behind the shelves made a hollow sound when books struck it, the addition did have a hardwood, parquet floor.

My Dad’s choice of architect, too, was telling of how the social geography of the house had changed. Even if my parents, siblings and I were still the only residents in the house, my parents had forged ties and made friends in the community whose social visits inherently broached community matters. The architect, Leon Bridges, was an African American who lived in Leschi, and among his many community activities, he volunteered together with my Mom on the Leschi Improvement Council.80 For both my Mom and Dad engaged with a variety of groups such as Model Cities, the Urban League, and the Central Area Motivation Program, where they met people of a like mind who were concerned about addressing increasing concentrations of poverty, differentials in education, and lack of opportunities. The community was small enough both in physical extent and personal connection that when we kids saw a brown and green station wagon identical to my Mom’s we knew it belonged to Ed Banks, a community organizer everybody knew, and when he visited us there were two identical cars in front of our house. My Dad’s endeavors to address social issues translated into efforts to increase minority enrollments at the University of Washington and to support the success of minority students. In 1967, as Associate Dean of the School of Medicine, he and six other faculty members across campus formed a corporation to fund minority scholarships,81 and he also served as an informal advisor to several Black students. Among these was Aaron Dixon, a co-founder of the


Black Student Union at the UW, who visited our house frequently, and who would soon found the Seattle chapter of the Black Panthers. The most frequent guest at our house though, was Lillian, a friend my Mom made through the PTA, who lived with her six children on 31st and Cherry. She had the greatest laugh in the world, and she became a regular fixture as my Mom made dinner on days when my Dad played handball with Luther Carr, a friend my parents had also made through the PTA. He and his wife, Frances, like Lillian, had children exactly my age—Brenda was in my class for several years, starting in second grade—and theirs was one of only two Black families I knew that lived in the heart of the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt—just steps from a small staircase leading right to Lake Washington Boulevard and Madrona Beach. Luther had been a football player at the UW but after a pre-season injury in the NFL ended his sports career, he returned to finish his degree and launched a career in business, venturing into insurance, development and construction. Also concerned with issues of racial equality, he was one of the athletes interviewed for Sports Illustrated’s groundbreaking series on the unequal treatment of Black athletes that ran in the summer of 1968.

Though I was just a kid and didn’t understand all the nuances, I gleaned enough from overhearing my parents’ table talk to know that things had been heating up locally since Stokely Carmichael’s visit the year before. Friction had heightened between the older civil rights leadership in Seattle and younger, more populist voices. The old guard was typified by the leadership provided by ministers at prominent Black churches such as the First African Methodist Episcopal (First AME) and Mount Zion Baptist, an approach perhaps visually epitomized at a national scale in the ministerial, suit-and-tie approach of Martin Luther King Jr. Desegregation in the schools was a commonly desired goal for this generation. The newer generation, whose visual and verbal cues seemed heavily influenced by Carmichael, was not necessarily so sold on desegregation or even on a broad coalition for change with at least one group, CORE, moving to exclude White members. When violent acts were committed, it was not even certain who was committing them: for instance, in late winter fires were set of at the headquarters of the Central Area Motivation Program, at Mt. Zion Baptist Church and at the Central Area Youth

82. Aaron Floyd Dixon, My People are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party Captain (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 64.


No culprits were ever apprehended or charged, and it remains an open question whether the fires had been set by anti-Black racists, or by Black individuals in the community frustrated by the slow pace of gradualist approaches to civil rights.

There was no mystery about who murdered Martin Luther King the next month in Memphis. I was still in third grade, and the schools closed early on the next day. Even though we were kids, we knew there had been riots in other cities and we weren’t exactly sure why we got out early, whether it was to honor Dr. King or to forestall potential outbreaks of violence. It was great to be out of course, but I also felt constrained, nervous, and went straight home on my own, cutting over to 35th at Cherry. When I went out, I avoided my friends on 34th. So, what did I do? I went to Bradley’s house and played with him, far down in his woodsy backyard sloping toward 36th. We didn’t say anything about this choice, but he seemed perfectly content with it as well.

Different experiences over the years had started giving us a sense of when it might be best to fade like this. The slap on the swing in first grade was the first, stark moment in which I recognized what some others primarily assumed me to be, that is, a White boy. But there were other incidents as well, usually with kids I barely knew or did not know at all. In our neighborhood, everyone knew who we were—even if they didn’t get the name quite right—Bodemeers, Bodemeiers, Baltimores—they still knew who we were. But that did not necessarily extend much past our block. For instance, I cannot remember which friend it was, but one day in second grade I went to his house, close to Union and towards Empire. We had been in the house only a few minutes when his older sister came home, and she immediately yelled at her brother to get me out of the house because their mother had said no White boys in the house. I left his house and even his yard. While waiting beneath some trees just past the fence, looking down at his house as she continued to holler at him, I wondered if he would ever emerge. I don’t remember if he came out and if we played some more or if I just stopped waiting and went home. Nonverbal cues that went with this assigned identity were no better. For example, it didn’t take too many repetitions to get the drift of who would always be picked last for team games, with the growing public discomfort of being the last ones left standing against the wall. It wasn’t just me that was picked last. Another of the unwanted attentions that seemed to go along with this assigned identity was having my head forced underwater at Madrona Beach when lifeguards weren’t looking. It did not happen often, but with that sort of thing two


86. Taylor, Forging a Black Community, 289, note 49.
or three times is enough to cause unease. But again, this treatment came from kids barely
known or not known at all, likely older kids from Madrona School, or kids from Mann,
Leschi or Coleman schools.

Sometime after Dr. King was murdered and the end of the school year, our teacher had
slapped Freddie, but aside from that incident—and the unforgettable day when one stu-
dent puked out so much lunch we had to evacuate the portable—our class remained
relatively peaceable.

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When the year came to a close in June, what started for me was the best summer ever.
Part of its greatness was actually being able to break out of my geographical ellipse entirely,
but an even bigger part of it was having the time of my life within the ellipse in what
seemed to be endless play and incremental nudging of its borders to their greatest extent.
In my kid mind, the most exciting thing in 1968 was my Dad’s brand new car—a Ford
Mustang convertible, aquamarine with a black top. He loved to go for joyrides, and as he
hated to do anything alone, he often drove me, my siblings, and my friends around in it.
It might be a pointless, short drive along the lake to Seward Park or in the other direction
through the upper road of the UW arboretum, where we could tilt our heads back and
glory in the dappled light through the overhanging branches. In the evenings, we some-
times ended up as far away as Enumclaw in the foothills of Mount Rainier. The most
glorious drive of all, though, started the very day after school ended, took three days, and
led to the Bay Area. It took us half a day to pack, but after we drove down Cherry to the
southbound 1-5 on-ramp, and as we went further than I had ever been in a car before,
past Mount Rainier, across the Columbia river into Oregon, through the Siskiyou’s, over
to the California coast, and on and on, with the top down most of the way, I felt giddy
with an unparalleled sense of freedom. In this car with no roof, I found myself gazing at
circling hawks, envisioning my life as a hawk, free to harness the wind and roam at will.
As I looked at the red rocks of the mountains—so different from the dark, close forests
of the Northwest—I imagined what animals were hidden there. For many years after, I
dreamed of running away to California—not to the cities—but to the landscape, where
I might range as I liked like some feral and free child. We stayed with my grandmother
in San Leandro and visited my Mom’s parents who then lived in a rented house in the
hills of Berkeley, on Euclid Avenue, less than two blocks from a park that had a network
of eucalyptus-lined trails and a polished, curved cement slide that scads of kids swarmed
in the temperate evening air. With its scent of eucalyptus and symphony of crickets at
dark, this park, so far from Seattle, was another magical wonderland, and another place
I dreamed about wanting to live in forever. While my Dad remained behind to teach courses at Berkeley that summer, my brother and I took a Greyhound Bus back to Seattle, where my Mom and sister had remained all along.

The summer was just as wondrous back in Seattle. It glows from afar like a wholesale vindication of one of the more offbeat 1970s definitions of what constituted a neighborhood, namely, that neighborhoods are defined by eleven-year-old boys. Boys that age are still young enough to have limited responsibilities and curtailed means of transport, but are highly uninhibited in exploring boundaries and associations, going places their parents would never go, meeting people their parents would never meet, yet returning at day’s end for a meal and a place to sleep. Though I only turned nine at the end of the summer, the oldest of our core band of friends was eleven, and Ty and I naturally followed the lead of the older boys.

I don’t know that I’ve ever had more fun than I did that summer. For one thing, we deepened our knowledge of nearby, abandoned spaces. The appeal of such indeterminate and secluded havens—so different than any school, house, store, or even yard—can hardly be underestimated. The best of these—because it was the closest—was the wasteland at the dead end of 34th. Not so far down the drop that Mr. Artis might hear or see us and then come running out like a jack-in-the-box, but atop the dead end itself, riding spider bikes through the humpy, labyrinthine trails forged between the weedy Scotch broom, but even better yet, just underneath the jutting, concrete platforms, in the dusty den-like crannies that you could only reach by means of daring the cliff-edge trail from 35th or clambering over the platform wall and sliding underneath. I don’t recall ever seeing anyone over the age of twelve in this wild wonderland that summer—not adults, not teenagers. And not that year but the following year, it became a place where we felt free to do things we knew we shouldn’t be doing—such as smoking cigarettes or drinking wine we had clandestinely lifted from our houses.

The next best abandoned space also offered perfect freedom from adults and older kids. Only a few blocks away, but seemingly much farther because it was so far down in the depths of the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt, lay an entire hillside of woods that included a small meadow, a swamp with skunk cabbage, a ravine with a swing, tattered trails with large holes, a lightning-struck tree stump, and traces here and there of wooden steps that had once been sound: all of it was the rampant ruin of a park that had once been the glory

of Madrona. We ran around with abandon there, making up games or just running for the sake of running, and before long we knew the trails by heart; we dug hopeless squirrel traps, looked inside tree hollows expecting to see raccoons; swung out over a ravine on a rope left by previous generations, and even chopped down a small tree over several days with an axe we had found in one of the raccoon-less hollows. That summer we even found, in a seeming miracle, a black car, shiny, not old, and not bashed up, in the very middle of the woods, where it had not been even a day or two before. We felt like we were the first people to find it, there were still things in the glove box, and we rummaged through the whole car. We even tried to figure out what path it had taken to get that deep into the woods, but we never did. We all walked back up the hill on that hot sunny day, winding around Randolph Place, up to 37th, then up the dreadfully steep two blocks on Cherry to get to 35th. Desmond went straight ahead on Cherry to reach his house on 34th up toward Columbia, while Bradley peeled off at his house on 35th, and Ty and J.J. peeled off on James to get to their house on 34th. At home, my brother and I told our Mom about the car, but she was not particularly curious, which was somewhat disappointing. Adults and kids have different priorities. Some nights I still dream about this abandoned civic park turned feral wood, with its tall Douglas firs, big maples, cedars, thistles, nettles, ivy, salmonberries, ferns of every possible kind, and even ferns growing out of moss-clad trees. In the dreams, I am sometimes anxiously trying to get from one side of the wood to the other, by a mix of running on footpaths and swinging on vines. Sometimes in the dreams I am late for school. Most often when I wake up, I have no idea if I had any reason or motive for being there at all in the dream.

We had plenty of fun near home as well. My brother and I had interested Ty, J.J. and Desmond in our attempts to catch butterflies on the Williams’ laurel hedge, and sometimes they took a turn with the nets, too. We would wait for the large yellow and black swallowtails to alight gently on the broad and brightly lit leaves, but our work with the nets was anything but gentle and of course accompanied by an outburst of noise after we sprang. We could never be certain if Mr. Thackery would come out from the other side of the hedge and tell us to go away, which we would do, at least for a while, until, from the distance of our lawn, we spotted another butterfly nearing the hedge. On one occasion we were particularly startled by the Thackerys as we hunted, but not in the usual way. My brother, J.J. and I were again trying to catch our not-always-so-elusive prey, and the red-headed Mrs. Thackery walked from the sidewalk into the Williams’ yard and invited us to come to their house. We’d never heard the older kids in the neighborhood mention

anything of this sort from the Thackerys. We were puzzled, even a bit worried, a bit like Hansel and Gretel going up to the witch’s house. In through the gate, under the shadow of the dark Douglas fir, Mrs. Thackery opened the door, invited us in, and motioned for us to stop just within the open door. As she called into the next room, we had our first glimpse ever inside the house. Just past where we were standing, bathed in velvety shadows, was a full size, gilt harp, taller than any one of us. Mrs. Wright came out of the shadows, her white face deathly white, and her white hair blue, and she had something rustling in her hand. Cellophane sheets filled with captured butterflies. She held the sheets out to us, assured us this was a wonderful collection, and let us gaze at a few of the specimens, although coming from the bright outside to the dark interior it was hard to make out much detail. In any case, she was giving the collection to us, and that meant there was no longer any need for us to try catching them on our own. There was a certain logic to this, but it was not a child’s logic. The real fun was the chase, wait, spot, follow, wait, spring. We were hunters, not collectors. Interestingly, I don’t recall chasing butterflies ever again after that. I am not sure if it was some genuine recognition of the attempt they had made, however clumsy, to reach out to us. More likely it was because we suddenly saw with half-sick stomachs what the end of our pursuits would be: a bunch of dead, falling-apart insects — and who really cares about that?

That summer, too, my Mom abetted a lot of the exploration and adventures of our small band. One of our favorite pastimes was to ask her to drop us off at the arboretum, near the large pond below the teahouse, where we could try and catch frogs and tadpoles, or just run around on the variety of trails, jumping over the little stream, or, in a more mischievous mode, dropping moss off the old stone bridge that so gracefully disguised water pipes. Before my Mom left, we would arrange to either walk back on our own, or, if we were feeling more adventurous, we would walk all the way over the Foster Island plank trails, run around the Museum of History and Industry, tickling the genitalia and laughing at the name of the stuffed Dik-Dik, then use the dime my Mom had supplied to call her when we were ready to be ferried home. On the days we walked home, we went down the steep hill by Harrison School, then curved on Denny to 34th and stayed on 34th most of the way home — right by the curve that had terrified me since my self-humiliation in the summer school class. There was one house in particular on 35th and Union that all my friends — Black and White — avoided because of the family that lived there — but even such avoidances were part of defining our neighborhood. My Mom also took us to the beach that summer, often driving us all over to the Carrs house, with Brenda and Dana joining us, and we would all splash around in the water while my Mom sat in her big straw hat, either chatting with someone she knew or reading.
The core of friends slept over several times that summer, downing giant bags of potato chips, drinking root beer floats, and if still hungry, chowing down some Captain Crunch. When the slow summer dusk turned dark, we trotted our pitifully small black and white TV set downstairs with the intent to stay up and watch scary movies. We’d set our sleeping bags, blankets, and pillows out on the living room floor, make it to the start of the movie, and then, like clockwork, fall asleep after the first or second interminable commercial break, only to be woken at the booming announcement that the broadcast day had come to an end, followed by the fuzzy static of the sign-off screen.

Though I was the smallest of our closest band of friends, Ty and I were the same age, and I think we were closer to each other in some ways because we were respective “young-ests”—a little behind in swimming skills, a little behind in understanding the nuances of the older kids, and so when we had giant sleepovers at our house, Ty and I usually camped out next to each other on the living room floor. That summer we had acquired two new kittens to eventually help our older Siamese cat, Bookie, keep the endemic rats (who absolutely loved the wild thickets of the bluff) under control. Ty spent more time with the kittens than anyone I’d ever seen before or since. When he came to our house, his immediate interest was in the kittens, playing, cuddling, talking to, and sheerly enjoying the handling of them. The kittens loved him too, and gave him carte blanche for any and all handling. One day, he had come up with a new trick, and as sometimes happened with me, he was too enthusiastic for our older friends. Holding the cat in front of him gently between his thumbs and fingers, he twirled the cat in a full circle, and shouted in a singing voice, “Ain’t this Acey Doucey!?” The trick with the cuddly kitten was fine enough, but his exultant cry of triumph—way too loud and too out of scope with the trick itself—was just too much, eliciting raw laughter rather than admiration. For months after that, when anything was seen as even mildly cool, such as a Corvette, or a hat tilted to the side, we would gesture to it and shout out, “Ain’t this Acey Doucey!?” Perhaps Ty had even forgotten how this joke had originally come at his expense, but in time he engaged in it like the rest of us.

I can’t say that my vocabulary necessarily grew that summer, but some words came into more frequent use in our little band, even if we didn’t fully understand them. “Bad” as a positive came into vogue about that time, but it stood out from the other terms because we knew exactly what we meant when we used it, either “cool” in a Stokely Carmichael kind of way, or just good, depending on the context. There were four other terms that were a little more nebulous but that didn’t stop us from using them: Dookie Stick, Dookie Man, Boodie Buster, and Pussy Farm. As early as first grade, perhaps even earlier, we would play tag, chasing each other with a Dookie Stick, sometimes imaginary, sometimes
an actual twig or branch, and sometimes that twig or branch would be poked into dogshit on someone’s lawn at the start of the game. The person who was “it” was the Dookie Man. Sometimes the Dookie Man was just the unfortunate kid who stepped into dogshit or rolled into it while playing football on the double lot. I always thought my friends had made this up and it was invariably funny when we used it. But if you look it up you will find that it has much more adult meanings to do with anal sex and prison, which I am fairly sure none of us exactly guessed at the time. Another term, not unheard previously, also came into more frequent use: Boodie Buster. Ty and J.J. used it to characterize our clairvoyant neighbor on 35th with the long black hair. This term puzzled me. I was not sure how one could break a boodie, but I also was confused about what “buster” was because I remembered hearing my parents talking about people who bought and sold houses who engaged in Block Busting. Of course, my brother and I asked them but received no clear answer. (As a side note, one might wonder about my alternative spelling of Boodie. The typical spelling is with a “t.” It might have been different elsewhere, but in our neighborhood it always rhymed with moody and not booty. For instance, when the game of Boodies ended and the winner had blasted everybody’s boodie with a basketball, it was definitely said with a D.) But that is a little beside the point, so now, onto the fourth term: Pussy Farm. I may very well have heard that for the very first time that summer while we were messing around on the concrete platforms at the end of 34th. The Pussy Farm was something you threatened people with, and we knew it had something to do with sex. Do something wrong—we didn’t know what exactly—and you might be sent to the Pussy Farm. To my mind the closest thing seemed to be a Funny Farm, where crazies went, but it seemed odd to me that the punishment at a Pussy Farm was that you would be forced to have sex over and over. To a boy’s mind—at least mine—that didn’t seem like such a punishment. What I didn’t understand then—and I am not sure my friends did—was that Pussy Farms were understood by some as no mere metaphor, but something that had been established by slave owners to satisfy their personal sexual desires.89

That summer also saw a dramatic expansion of my range to the west on Cherry. My Mom’s friend Lillian lived on 31st and Cherry, and since we had begun playing with her kids, including Victor, who was my age, we had started making the transit there and back on foot. The new range stretched even further yet—as far as 23rd Avenue and Garfield High. In part, this was because the playground there was closer to Victor’s house than Madrona, but also because my brother and J.J.’s baseball team had practices and games on the

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Garfield baseball diamonds next to the playground. During the older boys’ games, we often found ourselves whiling away time on the merry-go-round, which was mounted on concrete, an unforgiving surface for small bodies flying off at high speed. This Cherry strip of my increased range, starting only one block west and north of my house, was in fact the boundary edge of the Madrona quadrant declared first in line for a 1970s program to counter “neighborhood blight.”

Identified signs of such blight included dilapidated houses, broken-down cars, vacant lots, and abandoned houses that served as invitations to vandalism and increased blight. What I remember was not as bad as all that, but elements of it—such as cars up on blocks, peeling paint, and dangling shutters—were definitely present. The slope down to the start of the flat near Empire was lined mostly by houses but also had Bluma’s, which happened to sell sandwiches, but was more notorious for selling drugs, and sported new bars over its windows after a recent spring bombing. Clustered near Empire were an auto repair shop, the FACTS (the Black-owned newspaper published on bright pink paper), and Brenner Brothers’ Bakery. On the south side of the flat towards 23rd stood a few apartments, while across from Garfield was the old wooden Horace Mann building, and a bit farther on, Jordan’s, a Black-owned pharmacy. After leaving the dusty Garfield playfield, any walk in the late afternoon back up the treeless, sun-bleached sidewalks of Cherry was not a thing anyone looked forward to. And, much closer to our neck of the woods, Victor and his siblings were always careful to avoid one family that lived just south of Cherry on 31st, an example of caution that we carefully mirrored.

For all the fun and exploration of that summer, there was also a rising quotient of anxiety. Some of it came simply from moving through more places and encountering people not as well known. One day, for instance, our little band had walked straight down 35th, forgetting to zig or zag to a different street before reaching Union. We were nearly to the end of the block when we realized some of the kids of the notorious family were out on their porch. They had seen us as well and turning back would have done no good. Though we stayed to the other side of the street this was not enough to avoid a challenge: the oldest boy stepped down off the porch and, shouting across the street, wanted to know what we’d said about his sister. Of course, nobody had said anything about his sister.


Maybe it was too much trouble for him to cross the street on a hot afternoon, but we managed to slide by without further confrontation.

Another day that summer, my brother, my sister and I had thrown all the usual cautions to the wind and dared walk down the Thackerys graveled driveway in search of our cat, Bookie, who had gone missing. As we emerged back onto the street, a small, White man from another house, wearing nothing but flip-flops and a towel wrapped around his waist, demanded to know who we were. When my sister told him our last name and pointed to our house, the light of conviction lit up on his face. “Bodemers,” he said. “I know exactly who you are. You’re White trash. Nothing but White trash. And you just stay away from that driveway!” As he padded back toward his house farther down on 35th, we went back to our house and reported this strange incident to my Mom. None of us had ever seen her as mad as she was then. She wanted to know which house the man lived in—it was a small house two doors up on 35th—one of two rentals bordering either side of a vacant lot. She told us to stay behind, and marched straight to his house. We don’t know exactly what she said to him but evidently something to the effect that he had no business calling her kids, or any kids, White trash, and what was he doing out on the street in a just a bath towel?

Most of the anxiety, however, came from larger tensions and events around us, especially as refracted through parental responses to those events. For one thing, though they never had any perfect proof, my parents strongly suspected that our phone was being tapped—which was pretty funny if true, because sometimes when my Mom wasn’t around my friends and I would make elaborate crank calls, looking up a man’s name in the phone book, hoping to get a woman to answer, one of us asking for the man in a falsetto voice, while the rest of us tried to imitate pool-hall sounds and conversation in the background. Stupid, of course, but we thought it was funny, and maybe any uninvited third-party listeners did, too—but I rather doubt it.

So, what evidence did my parents have that our phone might be tapped? Well, they claimed to hear odd clicking noises—I am not sure that I ever heard them—and they noticed that workmen appeared on the telephone pole at 34th and James with surprising regularity. Though they made an effort to joke about it, this did not entirely mask their underlying anxiety. So why might my parents think our phones were being tapped? Was it because of my father’s association with Aaron Dixon, who had by this time founded the Seattle Chapter of the Black Panthers? Was it because my sister was babysitting for the infant son of another Black Panther, who just happened to be Aaron Dixon’s brother-in-law, and who lived in the motel-like apartment complex on 34th between James and Cherry? Or was it because my Dad was at Berkeley, where clashes and demonstrations had led to
temporary curfews, and where he had met with Bobby Seale? Any or all of these things might have sufficed for surveillance whether it was actually in effect or not.

Though unaware of the larger picture, I definitely felt my parents’ anxieties. I can still see the look on my Dad’s face a few months earlier when he and my Mom had first learned that Aaron Dixon was founding a local chapter of the Panthers. For several days, my Dad’s thin lips became more compressed than usual, and his brown eyes stared ahead as if he were looking into another world. At the time, I took the look as disappointment at Aaron’s turning toward the more militant approach to civil rights, a discussion he and my Mom had right then and there in front of us kids; in retrospect, it was also the look of worry for the safety and even life of the nineteen-year-old.

My parents, and a lot of people in Seattle, especially in the Central Area, had a lot to be anxious about that summer. And a lot happened, especially in July. And when I say a lot, I mean really a lot. After Aaron Dixon was arrested and jailed by Seattle Police on the charge of stealing a typewriter, street violence broke out for several nights running. Much of it centered on Cherry down towards Garfield, but it also came much closer to our house on 35th. Lin’s was firebombed, and so was a red car on 35th only half a block from our house. As for Lin’s, the neighborhood consensus was that it might have been political or it might have been anybody; sadly, I can’t remember anyone saying that they felt bad about her store getting bombed. As for the red car that was bombed, general


consensus on 34th was that it was not political; most were pretty sure it was a speed freak on 34th who had done it, and that he had bombed the car to settle a personal score with the doctor who owned it. Moreover, this same speed freak (whose name I can’t remember at all) was later thought to have fired the only shot at a political protest at Seattle University—again, not because he was political, but because he seemed to relish any chance for this kind of stupidity.

My Mom and Lillian were both on edge that month, and in my Mom’s case it didn’t help that my Dad was still away teaching in Berkeley. Shortly after Lin’s and the car on 35th had been firebombed, we had another sleepover at our house with our band of friends, and because it was so hot we thought it would be a great idea to sleep out in the front yard. My Mom, understandably, was not about to agree to this, and before it even got totally dark, we got a first-hand shiver of our own. We were still horsing around in our front yard in the gathering dusk when we noticed some people in the Thackerys front yard, an unusual enough event in itself. At the corner of the yard nearest James, Mr. Thackery was conspicuously showing his wife how to aim either a rifle or a shotgun, I have no idea which. We stared for a minute or two, to see if we were really seeing what we were seeing. They also gave us a good profile view, to make sure we were seeing what we were seeing. So much for the packets of butterflies in cellophane of just a few weeks before. We didn’t stay out in the yard much longer and went back into the house even though it was far hotter inside.

The disturbances went on for what seemed like the better part of July. As kids, we remained pretty clueless, but we heard enough to know that the main action was on Cherry, down by Garfield, where police and rioters were skirmishing and where a lot of rocks were being thrown at passing cars. A friend of Bradley’s older brother, who had driven down Cherry from I-5, went to the hospital for an eye injury after a rock had smashed through his window, so we knew people weren’t just making it up. Just after dark one night when it was still uncertain if things had died down or not, my brother and I had been hanging out at Victor’s house when his mother had asked him to go to the store to get aspirin. Maybe it had become normalized, or maybe my brother and I were just idiots, but when Victor asked if we wanted to go, we said yes and tagged along on the route to the nearest open store, Jordan’s, just short of 23rd and Cherry. Walking down the slope towards the flat we saw flashing lights of police cars, and silhouettes of people crossing the street in no particular pattern, but definitely not in crosswalks. Once on the flat we started holding close to the far right of the sidewalk—although the irrepressible Victor kept talking away. Outside the door to Jordan’s some Black guys in naturals, who were either very old teenagers or newly emerging adults, were standing calmly and nodded their heads down at
the three of us with bemused smiles. My thought at this distance is that they were serving as informal security for the store. In any case, they let us through, we bought the aspirin, and headed back. More people were now moving about the street where they didn’t normally do so, and rather than pause to get a better look, we sped up, and started to count ourselves lucky. But it was too good to be true. Just as we started up the hill, a lone, older teenager came rushing across the street towards me and my brother, wielding a baseball bat high over his head. Victor—who was much smaller and younger—suddenly looked very big and jumped between him and us—and shouted that we were his friends. Maybe the guy knew Victor had an older brother or maybe Victor’s vouching was enough, but the guy lowered his bat and kept on the downhill slope to the flat part of the street where much, much more seemed to be going on.

When Victor’s Mom learned that my brother and I had gone with him, she had grown panicked, and sent two older siblings out to find us. We were nearly back when our paths crossed. Of course, Lillian was relieved to see we were all right, but she laid into Victor then and there, asking him what was he thinking, and yelling at him that she didn’t say to take us with him. None of us mentioned the close call with the bat, which was unfair in a way, because he had done a really good thing, too, in standing up for us, but she would probably just see it as confirming how dangerous the whole thing had been in the first place. After she had said her piece, she sighed and told him to walk us all the way home to make sure we got back safely. Even though our house lay in the opposite direction from all the skirmishing, my brother and I definitely appreciated the company on the way.

Things seemed to calm down over the last weeks of the summer—no more fire bombings close to our house, no more evening firearms practice at the Thackerys—but who can say if that wasn’t just from the perspective of kids who were basically intent on swimming and messing around? Our green and brown station wagon barely survived the summer, refusing to start one day after my Mom had come to collect our band at the arboretum, and before long was replaced by a used Custom 500 sedan, a strange shade of almost-turquoise that might be called anemic, with an engine that had a notable lack of power in first gear. In late August, we trekked by Greyhound Bus to rejoin my Dad in Berkeley, and while we kids went up and down the wondrous slide at the park on Euclid Avenue until long past dark, my parents and grandparents watched the televised violence between protesters and police at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. We could tell that for them the chaos at the convention was exceptional, disturbing, even aberrant. For us, on the other hand, who had no long view, but only the in-your-face killings of Martin Luther King, Robert F. Kennedy, and even rioting in Seattle, such shouting and night-sticking seemed pretty much like business as usual. At my age, it was pretty easy to
compartmentalize, and a good romp through the arboretum or swim in the lake with friends did wonders to dispel such ongoing turmoil. I was more terrified of the recurring dreams of a monster in my closet that looked like the body shields that baseball catchers wear than I was of all the things that were happening around me.

The Neighborhood as Crumpled Handkerchief

So far much of my experiential description of neighborhood has been framed in spatial terms, defining it alternately as where I could go and did go by foot, or as bounded by where my slightly older friends and I could go and did go on foot, before returning to our homes for supper and sleep. By the summer of 1968, that territorial range went from Madrona Beach on the east to 23rd on the west, the dead ends on the south, and Union at the north, with discrete pathways through the Harrison neighborhood that linked it to the arboretum. Another way to picture neighborhood, within that territorial extent, is to focus more on social juxtapositions and interpenetrations that do not neatly align with static spatial markers. What do I mean? Well, picture, for instance, a handkerchief. Pull it all wrinkled out of a pocket. Iron it. Draw a circle on it. Then crumple it up and put it back in a pocket. Parts of the circle that were distant from each other when the handkerchief was flat might now be very near, even superimposed, and not always where you might expect.95 Just so, in my neighborhood, vast social distances were sometimes abrogated.

I mentioned how the house as social space had changed since we’d moved in as our parents had made friends, and of course this was just as true as my brother, sister and I also made friends who also came to the house to play, mess around, and even sleep over.

However, there were uninvited visitors as well. The first such visit occurred shortly after the addition was completed while we all slept upstairs. The trace (or more accurately non-trace) of the visitor was a vanished briefcase that had been set near an open window the night before. Though the loss of the wrinkled leather bag and its folders of academic bric-a-brac was trivial and no doubt disappointing to the burglar, the manner of the theft invoked a quiet unease. Eyes, a hand, and an arm had reached silently into our space and taken what they pleased. Our house was neither a bulwark, nor ours alone: the unknown someone, and even unknown others, could always visit again, and as a precaution we took to locking the downstairs windows at night. In 1968, an ornamental dagger (strange wall decoration, admittedly) vanished: in this case, none of us could say exactly when the loss had occurred because it was not, like a briefcase, something you would have gone looking for, and missed, right away. It was always possible, too, that it had been purloined by one of our many friends, some of whom, in my sister’s case, were advancing well into their teenage years. In fact, even in the case of the briefcase, there is nothing to say that the unknown thief might not have been known and familiar in other respects and knew exactly where that briefcase might be found unattended.

Shortly before Christmas that same year, such small, subtle pilferings gave way to something entirely different. As my family piled out the front door and into the Mustang to do some planned Christmas shopping at the new Southcenter Mall, some of my sister’s older teenage acquaintances—two brothers who lived near 34th and Union in a house of all brothers, and another guy who lived somewhere towards 30th—were hanging out on the bars at the end of 35th. It was not a place they often frequented, and it was cold outside, but as we paraded out to the car and drove off, we had no reason to think much about it. In any case, we were distracted because shopping at a large mall was novel and exciting for us.

It didn’t take long after our return to start wondering if we should have taken more note of the guys hanging out at the bars when we had driven off. After parking in the front and ferrying the first shopping bags up to the door, the first clue that something was amiss was the fact that the chain lock inside the door was fastened. Rather stupidly, we found this puzzling, but my Dad, the last one up the walkway, immediately knew what this meant, since we had all left from that door. I had undone this chain lock from outside the door in the past and started to work on it, with the rest of the family clustered nearby. As I fumbled with the jingling little chain, we all heard a huge bump inside the house—like something heavy dropping—then hard footsteps and the sound of the back door slamming. My Dad took off at full speed down the side of the house but by the time he got to the driveway, there was nobody in sight either down the alley or on the street. Although
I didn’t get the chain undone, my fumbling did allow the intruders to escape, which, in retrospect, was probably just as well. There is no telling how far my Dad’s Marine combat training, fueled by rage, might have gone.

The inside of the house suggested that the loud bump we heard was just the end of the party. In the upstairs bedrooms, drawers hung out like tongues, and clothes were tossed about on the floor, mixed with other random junk from the drawers. The worst havoc was in my room: all my kid’s junk—puzzles, pennies, bones, rocks, little jars of paint—had been tossed off of shelves onto the old fir floor. What counted as my desk—a narrow paint-stained board resting on two low sets of drawers—had been swept free of its clutter, and the drawers thrown helter-skelter on the floor. I quietly cried as I cleaned up the mess, but what I really remember is how upset my parents were—they both said they felt violated, and that was probably my first introduction to that word. Because of the jumble it was a little hard to tell the police what was missing, but I don’t remember it being much more than two clock radios. As I think back on it now, the mess seemed more to the point than any profit, and to this day I wonder why my room had been the most trashed of all. It was also odd that there were no signs of forced entry. We had no proof that the intruders were the guys hanging out at the end of the street that day, just as we had no proof that they knew anything about our planned trip to Southcenter. But one further piece of information made it seem more likely. The same day, my friend Bradley had climbed up in the plum tree by my bedroom just before dinnertime—in other words, only shortly after we’d left on our shopping junket. He’d heard a bunch of banging around, but thinking it was perhaps some sort of family dispute, he’d quietly climbed back down the tree and left. We heard the last bang when we returned hours later, and it wasn’t as if anyone had posted a lookout, because I fumbled unnoticed at the front door for at least a minute when we got back. Both seem like behaviors more consonant with burglars who expect you to be gone for quite some time. In the metaphor of neighborhood as crumpled handkerchief, this incident was an intimate superposition of two socially distant parts of the circle. And after that break-in, my Dad started talking about getting a dog or an alarm or both.

Before the break-in, I had moved into fourth grade where my classroom was back in the main building and I had been reunited with many of my favorite playmates from first and second grades. That year Garrett and I both had the honor and responsibility of serving on the safety patrol as crossing guards. This meant we got to leave the class a few minutes early before lunch and at the end of the day, and also got to return to class after lunch a few minutes late, after putting away our vests and flags. There was a rotation schedule for corners of intersections, with two guards at most intersections, and sometimes the two of us got to work the same intersection.
Because of this new role, I deepened my experience of different intersections. At the sleepy corner of 32\textsuperscript{nd} and Spring, I often found myself wondering what a sanitarium was, because there was a small one located on the southwest corner. Not much happened there, it seemed, and I wondered if it was where people who went insane went to get sane, like a nicer word for Funny Farm, which again led me to wonder just what a Pussy Farm might be. The corner was so slow you had lots of time to think about things like that. 32\textsuperscript{nd} and Union was a busier corner—with a bus stop just to the west of it, and an apartment building across from the school. When Garrett and I were paired up there we tried to carry on conversations across the street or waved our flags in new and entertaining ways.

34\textsuperscript{th} and Union was the most happening of all the intersections. With Joe's, the IGA grocery, the cleaners, the pharmacy, two hair shops and the holding zone for buses, there was a lot of activity, and it wasn’t just kids going home for lunch or getting candy after school. There were plenty of adults, too, who unwittingly created a small dilemma for us when they showed up at the crosswalks. We were told we should put our flags out for them, but they didn’t always pay attention to us. One group that usually humored us, though, were the members of a political party that had just opened up their offices two or three doors from the corner: The Black Panthers. This response wasn’t surprising—and not just because one or two of them knew me. The Seattle chapter had a strong emphasis on kids, developing a free school breakfast program at Madrona Presbyterian Church and a children’s health clinic as well. They also just liked kids. Maybe it was because they were barely out of childhood themselves, or maybe it had something to do with the era in general. The daunting photos taken of the Panthers in front of their office—like the other shop fronts near the intersection, tired and run-down looking—but with posters plastered across the windows—should be tempered by the image of them letting tiny fourth graders shepherd them across the crosswalk with their safety patrol flags. Some people indirectly blamed the Panthers for driving other businesses out of the small commercial hub at 34\textsuperscript{th} and Union—for instance, the Cirque Playhouse closed in the spring of 1969 after twenty years in the same location.\textsuperscript{96} But there was far more to the growing decrepitude than the Panthers. For instance, the large windows on the Union side of the Madrona Pharmacy had become titillating targets for the notorious family who lived just around the corner on 35\textsuperscript{th}. At first the pharmacy owner had replaced the windows, but eventually resorted to plywood as a less fragile, though far less attractive, alternative. This had nothing to do with the Panthers.

Although my parents were not particularly thrilled with Aaron Dixon’s choice to lead the Seattle chapter of the Panthers, they remained supportive. This even included loaning him a car so he and other Panthers could attend a funeral in January for a Los Angeles Panther leader, Bunchy Carter, who had been slain by a rival militant group. I probably would have remembered nothing about this loan if not for the fact that the car had been abandoned after going off the road near Gorman, California. Because my Dad hated doing things alone, he took my brother and me out of school to make the pilgrimage to Gorman to retrieve our ghastly blue Ford Custom 500. Under normal circumstances, I would have loved getting pulled out of school, but my Dad, understandably, was not in a very good mood. We flew to Bakersfield, and the following morning took a taxi fifty odd miles to a repair shop outside of Gorman. The car was still up on the rack, with the damage to the underside still being worked on. We killed time at a restaurant, waiting for the repair to be done. My brother, who had already not been feeling well, was getting worse by the hour. When we finally got into the car at mid-afternoon, he had a fever and we managed to buy some aspirin before jumping onto I-5 and heading north. We made it as far as Redding that first day, with my brother lying down on the bench seat in the back. None of this made my Dad any happier. On the second day, as we neared Chehalis, a state patrolman pulled us over. “Do you know you were going 90 miles an hour, sir?” My Dad did not deny it, and he gestured to the sick boy in the back. The highway patrolman actually took pity on my Dad and let him off with a warning. It was probably the closest to a good thing that happened on the trip. Well, that and the fact that the six-cylinder car, which had struggled on the mountain grades, now had a name: the Gorman Gasper.

You might have thought this episode would dampen my Dad’s commitment to redressing inequities experienced by minorities—or at least his support for the Panthers. But only three months later, in April, when he spoke at a Princeton conference for increasing Black enrollment in medical education, he advocated for reaching out to students before they reached high school, and doing so specifically by incorporating groups such as the Black Panthers, who had such strong appeal for younger kids. Though that same year he and the other faculty who had established the Student Opportunity Scholarships officially dissolved the corporation, they had done so in light of the fact that the UW itself had launched a far more robust program, with $70,000 available at the get-go. It was about

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97. Dixon, My People are Rising, 144.
this time, too, that he helped author an ambitious public school proposal that combined year-round schooling with magnet schools as a means to counter segregation. I remember this last only because one of my friends’ Moms had read it and wanted me to find out from my Dad exactly what an ombudsman was. Though none of us kids actually read the plan, we heard enough about it to privately bewail any prospect of something like year-round school. That January was perhaps an especially cursed month for my Dad, though. In the waning days of the month, the Seattle Urban League Director, Ed Pratt, was murdered outside his north end home during a rare spell of snow.\(^{100}\) After learning about this, for days my Dad had the same dour look that he’d had when he found out that Aaron Dixon had founded a Black Panthers chapter.

In early 1969, my Mom looked for a paying job. Through her community connections she quickly found one, working as a receptionist for Urban Construction Company, located at 12th and Jefferson. The company President was Johnny Allen, a Black contractor who lived on 32nd and Cherry, who had been the head contractor for the addition to our house and was also an associate of Luther Carr. Urban Construction was a hub for local Black contractors, and that spring it hosted a breakfast for subcontractors and their families. In retrospect, the choice of venue was really strange. True, there was a place for kids to roam and romp, and true, the pancakes were sweet and tasty. But it was forty miles out of the city, at a restaurant overlooking Snoqualmie Falls. In 1969, that was way out in the country. Someone must have put on their White voice when they’d made the reservation by phone weeks ago—or who knows, maybe my Mom as receptionist had made the reservation. But the staff was clearly surprised when we arrived. The servers had that deer-in-the-headlights look when the whole dining room suddenly filled with mostly Black faces. Even as a fourth grader, I could sense how anxious they were to get away from the table as some of the contractors asked detailed questions in the process of ordering, and how quickly and with what relief they retreated from the table once they had scribbled the orders on their pads. I made one friend that day, Greg Scott, who in due course would become unforgettable. Like Victor, Greg had no qualms about saying what he thought would be funny. He lived on 34th near the bend at Denny, and though I had seen him at Madrona School I had never been in a class with him. While the adults stayed up at the lodge yakking it up, he and I, along with my brother, and Brenda and Dana Carr, ran amok down where the river emerged from the waterfall. Sometime over the next year, he gave

me the official title of “Bucktooth Freckleface Scientific-Eating Shitworm.” I probably shouldn’t have thought the name was funny, but I did, and laughed every time I heard it. His Dad, like my Dad, was an ex-marine, but younger, with combat experience in Vietnam instead of Okinawa. A committed activist for equality in employment opportunities, by fall of that year he was organizing and leading shutdowns of prominent construction sites with government funding—including sites at the UW and Sea-Tac airport—protests that eventually had a national impact on hiring practices. My parents’ associates and friends then remained much as before, if perhaps in a slightly widened circle, and in this sense at least were not encountering the neighborhood in the mode of crumpled handkerchief.

One new but very temporary haunt that year was a place where Victor and I sometimes ventured after school. It was near Pike and 35th and we were always careful to go there by way of 34th so as to avoid the family near Union, which was only a block or so away. It was a big, dark, and boxy house that we simply called “The House”—a shortened version of Victor’s original name for it, “The Hippie House.” It was impossible to tell who it was that actually lived in the house, just as it was impossible to tell visitors from occupants and if there was anyone in charge, probably nobody could have told you even then who it was. Assorted people on or just past their final teenage years were always coming and going—guys, girls, Black, White, jeans with holes, bare feet, hippie hair and wide Afros. Music was usually playing and there was often the smell of weed. I don’t remember actually going into the house—maybe once into the front room, dark with wood floors—but mostly we hung out on the front steps and yard, just messing around with whoever was there. It was a bit like the vacant expanse at 34th, but with people in it. Victor and I heard one day that the house had caught on fire and burned down. After that news, we did not even bother to look at the ruins.

It was during that year that my last remaining White friend who lived in the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt moved to the suburb of Bellevue. Although we had sometimes casually walked home together from school, much of our time still had the flavor of the play date. It wasn’t because he lived that far away—I could walk there easily enough though the haul back included both steep blocks on Cherry. But in contrast to the simpler


103. Richman, Madrona Memories Part 2.
messing around in the neighborhood, we often engaged in structured activities away from the neighborhood, requiring a car and hence parental mediation. For instance, renting and riding bikes at Green Lake, or driving to the Cascade foothills for an all-day hike, usually preceded by a sleepover. Even the sleepovers had a slightly different flavor. Partly it was because it was just us two, and not in a horde, as at our house. And partly it was because the ambient noises down in the greenbelt were so different. As I lay with my ears open before going to sleep, I could hear, beyond the slight rustling of leaves, the brief, peaceful hum of cars as they moved on and off the metal grates at either end of the floating bridge. From my bedroom windows on summer nights, by contrast, the distant sounds were car engines gearing up after making the stop at 34th and Cherry, sometimes even tearing out loudly, then fading as they went down up 34th or down Cherry.

The neighborhood as crumpled handkerchief was never more in evidence than in 1969, and most of all perhaps during that summer. First of all, on the least personal level, it was the summer the ice cream trucks stopped coming. I saw my last one on Cherry Street late one sunny afternoon, creeping and wobbling from 34th to 35th, having just come down from the slight hill on 33rd. Older kids and teenagers had swarmed the truck, but not in the idyllic sense of gathering around it with a coin in hand. No, they had physically mobbed it. Bodies, arms, and legs swarmed every surface, including the roof and windshield, until the pitifully small truck had practically disappeared. As it came precariously towards us, two of my friends jumped on, too, struggling for any kind of foot or handhold. The truck shook from side to side as it crawled forward, and even the tinkling tune began to sound like a dying duck, suffocating, until finally topography came to the driver’s aid. As soon as he dipped down the steep grade toward 36th, small bodies started leaping away from the truck in self-preservation before it could gain too much speed.

On a more personal level, my bike was stolen that summer—twice. The first time, our little band had gone down and ridden in circles on the St. Theresa playground. When my friends had already moved on, I was left straggling behind, because I couldn’t get back up on my red bike, which in truth was too big for me. I had just succeeded in getting up on the pedals when the second oldest brother of the notorious family at Union walked up to me. He told me to get off the bike. I guess I had learned my lesson from the slap, and complied without complaint. I dismounted, he took it, got up on it, and rode towards his house. I probably don’t have to say that I was humiliated, but I was, so I will. I was also angry that I was so helpless. Interestingly, I was not that attached to the bike itself, but as it was part of a contract for mowing the lawn and pulling weeds the previous
summer, I couldn’t just tell my Dad that I had lost it. So I walked home, went into the library addition where he was working, and told him what had happened. It was only a matter of minutes before we pulled up to their house in the Mustang. I followed my Dad as he marched straight into their backyard—where neither my friends nor I would ever have dreamed of going—and the boy was sitting on the back step, with the bike resting on the ground near by. “Give the boy his bike back,” my Dad said. The boy replied that it was his bike, not mine. Much more slowly my Dad repeated the demand. “Give … the boy … his bike … back.” Something in his tone had shifted. The boy docilely lifted the bike off the ground and rolled it toward me. I was amazed. Not one to tempt fate, though, I fought my way up onto the pedals and raced back down 35th toward our house.

The second time my bike was stolen, it was for good. I was pedaling back toward my house from somewhere, I don’t remember exactly where, but mostly because I really had to pee. I rolled up the front lawn and dropped the bike on its side before running into the house. Immediately after unleashing a pressurized torrent, I went back to the front lawn. Amazingly, my bike was gone. I hadn’t been gone for much more than a minute, and it was gone. More amazingly, its place had been taken by another bike—smaller, blue, and probably stolen in its turn. As it turned out, the swapped bike was a blessing in disguise. It was not too big or too heavy like the one that had been taken, and I was much better able to keep up with my friends.

My friends had always showed caution about that family near Union, and the bike incident confirmed that such worries were by no means baseless. Only a few weeks after my bike was taken from me for the asking, I had to venture down that way again. I had the mother of all toothaches, and the dentist’s office was located in a house on 35th Avenue just past Pine. As both my parents were working that day, I had to get there on my own. I had the entire night before to I think about it, and it is hard to say which was worse that night: the pain of the toothache or the fear of having to walk by that house on 35th, accompanied a jumble of half-awake images for any saving alternate route. Fear and pain fed into each other in a terrible combination.

Ironically, I made it to the dentist the next morning without the least hassle, walking straight down 35th. The dentist quickly pulled my tooth, and when the Novocaine wore off, there was soreness, but nothing like the extreme pain of the preceding night. It was even fun to spit blood on our front lawn that afternoon for all my friends to see.

I learned something huge that morning. If you don’t want to get hassled, go early, before the people likely to hassle you have even gotten up. Routes, it turned out, were not just about distances and geometry—they were also about timing.
But we could not always choose our own timing. Walking up Cherry from Garfield, for instance, on a hot, late afternoon in August was about as bad a time as there could be. Yet that’s where my brother and I were on his birthday that summer. We’d gone on some kind of all-day group outing somewhere and the bus afterwards had dropped us off at Garfield. We were close to 31st when three of the boys from the family we had been warned to avoid spotted us and decided to cross the street and block our way. They took the higher ground on the sidewalk and one asked for a quarter. As we searched our pockets, I told them that if they really needed a quarter I was sure if they came home with us my Mom could give them one. In cases like this there was no right answer, and believe it or not, I was not trying to be smart—my Mom would give them a quarter. My brother got hit almost instantly and then was shoved down onto the grass sloping to the sidewalk. He told me to start walking home and I took his advice at first. But a few steps up the hill I grew enraged. I have no idea what I had in mind, but I charged full speed downhill at the boys, screaming as I went—I don’t even know what I was screaming—maybe something about it being his birthday. I launched myself through the air. One of the boys simply put his fist out and stopped me mid-flight, fist to nose. Though there were gushes of blood, there was something to be said for making noise. Someone yelled from across the street, “Leave them White boys alone!” We all looked and saw a Black woman on a porch, who yelled it once more. I don’t know what heft she carried, but the guys snorted and started down the hill, laughing. My brother got up off the ground and we walked the rest of the way home. He might have asked what I was thinking when I said our Mom could give them a quarter or launched myself down the hill, but more likely we just walked home without saying anything at all. I spent the dregs of the afternoon with my head tilted back, soaking my face in cold washcloths and decorating them with ever-shrinking splashes of blood.

That summer another house was burglarized on our side of 35th, just a few doors south of Cherry. The homeowners were a staid middle-class Black couple that held not only the neighborhood kids, but even my parents at a polite distance. The only time I remember any of us talking to them was after that burglary, as we stood out on their back patio the next day. That burglary was particularly awful, because their Boxer, Queenie, had been clubbed so hard on the head that the owners had to have it put down. Breaking into somebody’s house was bad enough, but it was still just property crime; beating a dog insensible was of a different order altogether. The kind of people who could do this were not the kind of people we knew in the neighborhood—or at least wanted to know—but here they were, on our streets and in our homes.

Whether it was the bombings and disturbances of the previous summer, or the increased vandalism on 34th, or the rise in burglaries, or accumulation of all these, two families that
had been in the neighborhood for a long time pulled up stakes and moved. The retired Admiral and his wife, whose adopted daughters were now ostensibly adults, left their house between us and the bluff in either late spring or early summer—they had a yard sale on a bright, clear day—and at the sale I gained some porcelain Collies and a new bed. The Thackerys would also be gone by the end of summer, but not before a new family had moved in next door to us.

We had never seen anything quite like this family. I don’t know quite how else to say it, and I am aware of the irony of me saying it, but man, were they ever so White. The father had recently been elected to a city office, and there were two children, both boys. I really wanted to like the boy who was exactly my age, but it didn’t take long to see that it might not work out so well. He was always quick to point out how much better his previous neighborhood of Lake City had been than where he was living now. The school was better, the houses were newer, the kids were smarter—it didn’t seem to matter what topic came up, it was always better. He even kept attending the school in Lake City rather than Madrona or Leschi. The mom, who really seemed to want this move to work out (and what mother wouldn’t want that for her family and kids) could not restrain herself from producing a stricken, forced smile when she saw the other kids in the neighborhood, with the result of us always responding with a farcical imitation of it. In or out of the driveway, she would smile away, and all the kids in our front yard would smile right back, moving our heads in unison. When either of the boys was frustrated with their Mom, we could hear them shout, “Jesus Christ, Mom!” with the last two vowels drawn out for an unnaturally long time. While I had really wanted to like the kid my age, I found myself loathing him—and it didn’t seem to be just me. His constant bragging about the superiority of Lake City even resulted in full-on plans for a sandlot football match between us and him and his north end friends. Of course, it was to be played in the north end, and one of my friend’s older cousins even rounded us up in a car on the appointed day and drove us all the way to Lake City. The cousin cranked up the car radio on Hot Fun in the Summertime and we all sang along with it. We found the field, which was empty, got out of the car, and waited for the other team. After kicking the grass a bit, and throwing our football around, we left. As far as we know, the other “team” never showed up.

Only one or two months after the politician had moved in, the Thackerys moved out. It was typical of the new boy next door that he rode around the dead end oval on his bike singing some variation of Ding Dong the Witch is Dead on the day they moved, which really didn’t seem to be his prerogative, as he had no personal history with them to complain of. In any case, out went the Thackerys and in moved a doctor, his wife, and their four children. The doctor had even been a student of my Dad’s at the UW. Of course, the
children were much younger we were, and we were now cast in the role of babysitters, just as older kids had been cast as our babysitters when we had moved in. It was in this capacity that we learned so much more about the interior of the house, with its dumb-waiter, speaking tubes for communicating from the master bedroom to the kitchen, and brick terraces on the back slope.

In fifth grade, with the new rhythm of both my Mom and Dad working, and my sister and brother both attending Meany Junior High, I was usually the first one home in the afternoon. On one such day—a sloppy, wet day shortly before Christmas—I was surprised to find the front door unlocked, and even more surprised when I followed voices and found my Mom and a neighbor sliding our massive stereo console across the floor. It was still one room away from the place it normally belonged, and the neighbor had showed my Mom how to slip magazines underneath to make it slide. I asked what was going on and learned that we had been burglarized—again. This time, though, they had come in the middle of the day, when we were all gone, but had been interrupted by one of our Black neighbors, Mr. Gladney, who often worked nights. He had noticed a junky brown car in our garage and had sauntered over to give my Dad a hard time about owning such a piece of junk. Then he saw strangers carrying items and putting them into the trunk. When they saw him, they hopped in the car and sped off, and he even gave chase in his own car, but could not make out the license plate through the heavy rain. The members of the family we suspected in the previous burglary had a car exactly fitting this description—brown, boxy, rusted—but since Mr. Gladney had not clearly seen the license number, the police could not follow up. The burglars made off with two clock radios that had replaced the ones stolen the previous year, while our puny portable TV remained shamefully in place, unlike the humongous stereo console, at the time a very hot commodity. Possibly they didn’t know the neat trick with the magazines, but it is hard to imagine how it would have fit in the car even if they had managed to get it that far.

Their manner of entry had been anything but mysterious this time. After crawling through the quaint delivery cubby and breaking the flimsy latch of its interior door, they’d found themselves upright in a locked utility closet with sundry hardware, screwdrivers, and hammers. With the conveniently available hatchet, they simply chopped through the door and reached around to open the handle, gaining entry to the rest of the house. In the aftermath, fragments of wood and paint chips lay on the hallway floor, while sharp splinters of panel still stuck out of the door like knife blades.
This second burglary invoked responses similar to that of the year before: anger, disgust, sadness, but above all, loud and clear as a tuning fork, the reverberation of insecurity. It was hard to tell which manner of entry was more unsettling—the unknown access method of the first burglary or the obvious hatchet work of the second. Two things were painfully clear: simple locks did not work, and something had to be done if we didn’t want this to happen again. Soon afterward, we had two solutions in place. And the fact that we had to contend with each on a daily basis exemplified how the neighborhood as crumpled handkerchief had conditioned our outlook and everyday behavior.

The first solution was technological: an alarm. Ironically, this solution reinforced our sense of insecurity with its every use, in part because it always gestured to the shameful reasons for having to use it, and in part because it left little margin for error before blaring out to the world that you felt you needed an alarm. Anyone who has had an alarm system knows what a pain they can be. But I beg you to imagine a really primitive one that requires an actual, physical key—and not only that, but one that is cylindrical and smaller than the last digit of a pinky finger. Imagine, too, that this alarm system requires you to hold the door open just far enough to get the key into its receptacle embedded in the doorjamb, but not one inch farther. Aim tiny cylindrical key, line up minuscule notch, insert, twist, keep the door at just the right aperture, and stand on tippy toes the whole time because your parents keep expecting you to grow, and you can guess exactly how much I loved that technological solution. When in my dreams I visit the house (and I sometimes do), I always find myself grappling with a jumble of concerns. Is the alarm set? Off? Do I have the key? Will the door swing too far and trigger the ear-splitting bell? Sometimes in my dreams the alarm goes off, which is bad, pointing to user error; other times, it does not go off, which is just as bad, for then I am left wondering who exactly is in the house.

The second solution was biological. Acknowledging the conventional wisdom of the day and aiming for a beast to invoke the greatest amount of fear, my Dad sought out the reputedly fiercest breed of dog: the Doberman Pinscher. Though she had a pedigree, the puppy we selected turned out to be the total anti-Doberman. Floppy-eared and long-tailed when we first got her, at heart she never outgrew being a puppy. Although my Dad had her ears clipped and tail docked to make her look every bit the ferocious guard-dog she was supposed to be, and even named her after the three-headed dog, Cerberus, she was anything but ferocious, and the only human she ever scared was the mailman, who was notoriously afraid of every dog on his route. My guess is that my close band of friends and I had so much fun playing with this dog from her early puppy days that we ruined her as anything like a watchdog. The best game ever was to latch the door to my room with her just outside, all of us climbing under a blanket on the bed, then calling nonstop
for her to join us. She would jump up and down excitedly until she finally hit the door-latch just right with her front paws, then raced into the room, leaped on the bed, and chewed playfully on us through the covers. This was great for hours of entertainment. One time, when playing the game right after I had rearranged my room, she came flying in at full speed and launched herself unstoppably into a bookcase where the bed had been, letting out a surprised yelp as she created a clattering explosion of my collected ribs, vertebrae and small mammal skulls.

I probably loved that dog as much as I hated the alarm, and playing with her and my friends did a lot to take my mind off the unfortunate reasons why we had added her to our household in the first place. There were clear downsides, though, such as cleaning up the piles out in the backyard, or watching my Dad rail after she had peed on the floor of the addition or scuffed it with her nails. I also wonder if I didn’t pick up a parasite when she was paper training. As the first one home, my job was always to perform the initial wave of cleanup from her daytime abode in the back hallway. That same spring, I also suffered from what I can only describe as sudden bouts of debilitating, gut-cramping, sphincter-burning, noxious, soupy diarrhea. The episodes struck suddenly and fiercely and then quickly cleared up just as mysteriously. It always started with clenching stomach cramping, soon followed by several hours of spurting fecal bile that smelled like death. If it started in the morning it made going to school impossible, for it was hard enough just to reach the bathroom in our house in time, and even when I made it wasn’t like I was getting out of there any time soon.

I did not connect the grisly bouts to the dog until decades later. At the time, there seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the outbursts and I even wondered if the cause was in my head because I sometimes found myself thinking about how my stomach was feeling even before any cramping had begun. Even then I second-guessed whether I might have started thinking about how my stomach was feeling because maybe there were already some subtle hints of cramping. A lot was going on at the time and the psychological cause of the mystery ailment was as good as anything else I had to offer.

What sort of things were going on? My Mom’s work at Urban Construction put her in a position personally close to the Central Contractors Association, which shut down several work sites including the Medgar Evers pool to protest employment discrimination at Garfield, and my friend’s Dad, Tyree Scott, was even arrested and jailed. Two houses

in Madrona were bombed very early that year—one barely two blocks away on 35th, another deeper in the Olmstedian Greenbelt, both residences of state legislators serving the district.¹⁰⁵ In fact, between January and May there were twenty bombings in Seattle, and the night that the house on 35th was bombed, a Central Area church, a store, and a restaurant were bombed as well. Accusations for responsibility flew in all directions: Black militants, leftists, right-wing racists.¹⁰⁶ One morning that spring I woke up to my parents in a state of outrage and on the phone trying to contact our congressmen—the president had announced an expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia. They were by no means alone, and demonstrations broke out across the country. In Seattle, protests that started at the UW diverted toward downtown, with tens of thousands of protesters closing down I-5 at least twice. At Kent State, the National Guard killed four protesters, and Madrona even closed down for one day to honor Black students killed by police during a protest at Mississippi State.¹⁰⁷ Even to me, events seemed much more intense than the perceived business-as-usual violence of the preceding year and a half.

Notably different, too, was the way the violence started to play out at kid level. At Meany Junior High, though my brother didn’t talk about it, the school was fully aware of a spike in racial violence, a spike so bad that one teacher didn’t even bother to tell my Mom that my brother had been skipping almost every day. I started to experience aggression more often, as well. Like the tail-end of the deep January snow when my brother and I were having a snowball fight with a couple of our friends near the new rope structure at the Madrona playground. Some other kids showed up, I had seen them around but didn’t know them, but my brother knew who they were. Though not noticing it right away, my brother and I soon found more and more snowballs aimed at us, and not just more, but made differently and thrown differently: they were more like compacted slush balls, and they were targeted at our heads. When my brother’s ear started bleeding from one of these ice balls, we decided to quietly go. I don’t recall that any of our friends made an effort to stop the barrage, and don’t know if they left with us or not.

That was also the year I started relying on the alleys between James and Columbia as my preferred route to and from school, rather than nearer parts of 34th or 35th. I am not certain if it was out of love for neglected spaces or by reason of avoidance that I started using

¹⁰⁵. Crowley, Rites of Passage, 281; Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders: Hearings before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate, 1969, Part 25, 5780.


the alleys almost all the time. I do know that I loved the alleys. I could slip the gap in the picket fence, go down our driveway, directly cross James and set down the unpaved, pocked, rutted, and mud-puddly mess between James and Cherry, and then advance right to its equally unpaved and unkempt successor leading from Cherry to Columbia. My legs and feet knew the width, length and depth of every puddle in each alley, and in rainy times I navigated by a series of jumps, both without ever landing in the mud.
Yet avoidance, as much as love, may have been in play. That particular spring, at least two kids wanted to start using me as their personal cash machine. In only a few short months, “Gimme a quarter,” had become a standard line. One of the kids was older, lived on 33rd past Cherry, had large circles under his eyes, and seemed to rove at many corners between Marion and James on 34th. On our second encounter, when I didn’t have a quarter, he told me that I had better have one the next time. Going to and from school, I started peeking at both corners before advancing from one alley to the next. If he had never caught up with me right by our driveway on James one day as I went home for lunch, I probably wouldn’t have remembered him at all. My Dad had made chili, which I loved, but by the time he set it out I felt the cramping coming on. My Dad was disappointed about me not eating what he made, and sulked, as he was suspicious of how my symptoms came and went with astonishing suddenness. To his credit, he did not make me go back to school that day. Whether or not my cramping had anything to do with what happened on the way home, I did not say a word about what had happened. I now felt I was too old to admit something like this without embarrassment. One time the cramps struck near the end of the school day, in PE, so I let myself get hit by a ball in Soak ‘Em (a game in most places more benignly called Dodge Ball) and then slipped nervously out the door instead of taking my place back in line. I barely made it to the bathroom before exploding, and I was still in the school bathroom when almost everybody else had already headed home for the day.

The last episode I can recall struck during a weekend trip to Bradley’s cabin near Mt. Baker. It was a place I loved to go—on Mosquito Lake Road—with a small lake that some might be inclined to call a marsh or a pond. When we arrived, there were signs that the cabin had been broken into and even occupied. By mid-morning the next day I felt the cramping symptoms and felt triply anxious and embarrassed because I knew that when I cut loose in the single bathroom right off the living room that the stench I produced would be both horrific and inescapable. The police actually found all the missing items—again, little stuff—at another cabin that had been broken into, and whether related or not, my bout cleared up as suddenly as it had come on. Again, I don’t know if specific events actually triggered the symptoms because if that was the case there were other incidents that spring that I would have expected to trigger them, but didn’t, so maybe I should just choose my after-the-fact theory and blame the dog.

One such event was a front row seat to a one-family police melee that beautifully exemplified the neighborhood as crumpled handkerchief. One afternoon after school my brother and I were playing on the corner at 35th and Cherry with another friend, not doing much of anything, really, just messing around. An alarm blared from the vicinity of the
red brick mansion that had once housed the British Consulate. None of us paid the least attention to it. Alarms went off a lot in the neighborhood and didn’t always mean much. Three older teenagers straggled towards us and started horsing around, too. The oldest two guys were brothers that we were quite sure had robbed our house both times. I suppose it is ironic, but they were friends of friends, and so we did know each other, and it was not entirely unusual to pass time together at a neutral venue like a street corner. The younger of the two brothers joked to us about working for the PO-leese. Another teenager from 34th was there, too, whom I’d never really thought of as someone who hung out with the brothers of that family. With the alarm still blaring as we messed around, and the one guy still joking that he worked for the PO-leese, a blue and white police car slowly approached then stopped in the middle of the street. Two White officers stepped out and came over to us. They mentioned something about the alarm and asked the older guys where they lived. The two brothers could practically point to their house, just around the corner on 34th. The police asked to see some ID. The guy who moments ago had been joking about being the PO-lease shot back: why would they need ID if they were right by their own house? The conversation went around in circles, the officer asking for ID, and the brothers asking why they should have it when they were so close to home. One officer drew the third teenager over to the squad car, patted him down, handcuffed him, and planted him in the back seat. He, too, lived less than a block away, but calmly accepted the handcuffs and took his place on the back seat. The officer left the door open and headed back towards us. The two brothers continued to jaw with his partner, getting louder and more strident, and as soon as the returning policeman produced another pair of handcuffs, the younger brother popped the policeman he had been arguing with, first in the mouth and then in the stomach. To this day, I swear I saw the blood spurt out of the policeman’s mouth after he was punched in the stomach—like a fountain—but I guess the blood was probably from the first punch to the mouth. The second officer scrambled back to the car and called for more police help, then came out and joined in the fistfight going on right in front of us. The coolest head in the whole affair was the teenager in handcuffs, who, seeing his opportunity, slid off the backseat of the police car and slipped away to the safety of home before more police arrived. In the meantime, the brawl between the two policemen and two brothers was a pretty even match, the brothers instinctively backing their way towards their own house and retreating quickly inside when more police cars roared up. The incident grew more threatening with the arrival of more even police and a crowd that had gathered, now watching as the house was laid under siege. Then, somehow, mysteriously, the whole thing turned ridiculous, with many of the onlookers laughing out loud. A gas grenade of some kind was launched into the house and what emerged were not the guys, but their mother, armed with the flimsiest of rakes, who started chasing uniformed officers down Cherry toward 35th, themselves
turning their backs and running from the wildly waving rake as she shouted, “My boys didn’t do nothing! My boys didn’t do nothing!”

In spite of the temporary release of tension through laughter, my brother and I, looking around now and realizing ours were the only White faces besides those of the police, showed discretion, and melted away like the guy in the handcuffs, heading for our house. My brother and I both gave official statements a few days later—I don’t know if it was for the Human Rights Commission or an internal police investigation—and we did so in the living room of the house right on the corner where the whole event had started. They asked us simply to state what we heard and saw, which is a shame, because if they had asked us for our opinion, we would have told them that what we saw was stupidity on every side.

In a really peculiar trifold crumpling of the neighborhood handkerchief that same spring, we had an encounter both with the man from below the cliff who had grabbed us many years before and the brothers involved in the melee. Bradley and my brother and I—in other words, three White kids—were hanging out on the bars at the end of the street, whiling away time, when Mr. Artis glared at us from below then shouted something at us. We were not at that moment provoking him in any way—though we certainly had in the past taken a delight with the rest of our small band in pelting his rooftop with unripe plums and vanishing from view. In any case, he must have had a surge of rage just looking at us, and he jumped into his Lincoln Continental. Oddly, in the time it took him to drive along Terrace, up 33rd, down James, and finally to the dead end at 35th—all in order to gain the distance of fifty yards that separated his house from us—another car—brown and boxy with rust and dents—had driven to the dead end, parked, and its four or five occupants had joined us on the bars. Two were the same guys that had engaged in the one family police riot—the others were even older—and all of them were pretty buff. Our neighbor was still so enraged when he pulled his car to a screeching halt that he didn’t notice the newcomers. He stepped out in an undershirt with his chest all puffed up but as soon as he saw the new arrivals his body caved in on itself, and he lost the wind in his sails for what had promised to be a lengthy rant. Now that he was out of the car, though, what was he going to do? The newcomers glared at him, and one asked how come he was charging up here all bad assed and screeching his tires like that. He mumbled something about coming to look at the view, then walked over to the bars. After a perfunctory look at the lake, he stepped back into his Lincoln, turned around and drove off much more quietly than he had come. Perhaps the sudden apparition of these guys confirmed something already planted in his mind, but on a later occasion he came up to harass Bradley when he was all by himself, and though, like many of our neighbors he
couldn’t quite get our name right, he advised Bradley to avoid the Bodemen’s because we were bad news and leaders of the White Black Panthers. After getting past the ridiculousness of White Black Panthers, I had to wonder how he had come to it. Was it just his imagination? Did he confuse the guys who had joined us at the end of the street with the Black Panthers? Certainly in the minds of some, the Black Panthers were just punks and criminals and maybe he didn’t distinguish them from these guys that didn’t have an activist bone in their body. Or had he gotten some information from his closest neighbor on Terrace—who lived in the house just on the other side of the cliff—and who was a high-ranking police official? Maybe someone had shared my Dad’s connection to the Black Panthers with him or had shared photos of my sister at a Panther rally holding a sign reading, “Off the Pig.” Interestingly, we never had any direct issues with the police official, whose house was just as close, but hidden in the trees. Though we bombarded his back wall once or twice with plums, he did not charge out of his house like a jack-in-the-box, so we had quickly lost interest and stopped.

My mysterious rounds of gastric explosions vanished before June, and another summer of fun and adventure opened up for our small band. My Mom had stopped working at Urban Construction, and sometimes drove us all to Madrona Beach in the Gorman Gasper. It always had trouble in first gear when leaving from in front of the Carrs’ house, and all of us kids would pretend to push on the dashboard to get it underway up the steep hill. We went to the arboretum more often than ever, trying to catch frogs and tadpoles, and also started going with Bradley’s Mom to Madison Beach. She preferred to swim at the quieter end of the shore by the apartment buildings where there were no lifeguards, and she would drive however many of us as wanted to go.

That was also the summer we developed a passion for digging underground forts. I am not sure how it started, but inspired by the movie The Great Escape we soon had two such forts. One was in Old Man Hatchet’s yard by a little shed with an old Coca-Cola sign hanging on the side. Covering our deepening hole with an assortment of available planks stacked by the shed, this one got to be deep enough for us to several of us to stand in. The second underground cave was an enhancement of a clubhouse in Bradley’s back yard built long before by his brother. Bradley, who was preternaturally handy with tools, created a hatch in the floor, complete with hinges, and, true to Great Escape fashion, we concealed it with a large patch of carpet. One day a huge boulder dislodged itself and tumbled out of the wall while we were taking turns digging and nearly slammed Bradley on the head. Undeterred, we kept expanding it, and its earthen benches soon fit at least four kids.
Ty, still enamored with our cats, one day brought one to Bradley’s yard while we were taking turns digging, and he climbed to the top of a tree with the cat and passed on his turn to dig to stay up with the cat. Ty was still the youngest of us in many ways, and still had a habit of going way over the top when he became excited. Late one overcast summer morning, we could hear him shouting from nearly a block away. As we leaned back on the bars, holding his handlebars with one hand, he had his other thumb and forefinger raised in the air, making the shape of a C. “It was this big!” he shouted over and over, “And it was shaped just like a hamburger!” He had just been in a vacant garage and had seen between the legs of a girl who wasn’t wearing underwear. Riding around the dead end oval, he kept shouting deliriously over and over. “This big! Just like a hamburger!” The only response he got from us was a lot of shaking heads and suggestions to keep it down—probably far from what he expected. Our suggestions were not out of any regard for the neighbors but had more to do with a sense of what was cool and what was not.

Our neighbor Rhinehart had been released and his sentence had been vacated (temporarily, anyway), and he was fully established back in his house that summer. This gave us more to watch as we hung out at the bars as assorted people went in and out of the front door. His pug Tiger was as libidinous and entertaining as ever. What proved more entertaining to us was our relationship with the politician’s family. Ty was along with us, when, sometime around the 4th of July, we executed our cruel idea of dropping a firecracker into their mail slot just to one side of the front door. Knowing that the houses of other local politicians had been bombed we all agreed it would be really funny to scare them this way. While J.J. crept up to the porch, lit the fuse, and dropped the ladyfinger in, the rest of us had already taken shelter behind the thick trunk of the Monkey Puzzle tree half a block away, a perfect spot for seeing without being seen. The Mom and kids were pretty predictable, and showed up on cue, standing on the front porch, with hands over their eyes, searching the horizon for the miscreants. Though they probably had a good idea who had done it, we did not get caught, and one of the boys later lamented that it had ruined the new wallpaper next to the door.

108. Atkins, Gay Seattle, 220.
My Personal Neighborhood Contracts

Big changes were afoot at Madrona when I returned at the end of that summer. The Seattle School District had developed an ambitious 4-4-4 plan, in which soon no school would have any single racial group with a concentration of higher than forty percent. Madrona was to be one of the first schools, and was already no longer even Madrona Elementary School, but part of a new hybrid beast, Meany-Madrona Middle School. What did this mean to a returning sixth grader? Most visibly it meant the destruction of some of my once-favorite spaces. For instance, the covered, semi-enclosed play court just below my first-grade classroom—an essential space for recess in drizzly Seattle—had been fully enclosed with walls, small windows, doors that locked, and bestowed with shelves, tables, and carpeting as part of its makeover into a Learning Resource Center. This progressive change also meant the phasing out of another favorite space at Madrona—the library. We were all carefully taught that a Learning Resource Center was so much more than a library, but what it meant to me was an impersonal space with bluish wall-to-wall carpet that smelled funny because the glue was so fresh. There were fewer books and in their place were some tables with small machines and a rack of headphones. Some of the machines were for viewing “film strips”—i.e., very slow-moving and poorly made educational movies. Another machine, one we were forced to use on several occasions, was designed to increase our reading speed. Presenting two lines of text at a time, the idea was to intensify the pace of the scrolling. I have no idea if it helped me read faster, but I do know it kept me from remembering much of what I read because I was more focused on getting the scrolling just right than I was on the meaning of what I read. On the positive side, this new space did have at least one very comfortable chair and I remember reading large chunks of the Count of Monte Cristo while sitting in it.

It was not only that the play-court had been swallowed up as part of Madrona’s transition to a middle school. The little kids’ playground (also under the window of my first-grade class on the second floor) had been stripped of its jungle gym and its usable space shrunken even further by the addition of two large portables. My sixth-grade class was in these portables, and as this was my first class on that side of the school since first grade, in a sense I felt like I had come full circle. But of course, with all the physical changes—no

110. Pieroth, Desegregating the Public Schools, 461.
jungle gym, no play-court, and a mere pittance of an open play space, it really didn’t seem the same at all.

The changes were not just to the old spaces as I knew and loved them. In its incarnation as the sixth-grade portion of a single middle school split between two locations, there were no longer any little kids there. I have no idea where they went, and I sure didn’t care at the time. But school systems, like nature, abhor vacuums, and their place was taken by an infusion of fifth and sixth graders, many of whom I had never seen before. In this reshuffling of students, many landed in my class, naturally displacing long familiar voices and faces, and in sixth grade I could count on a single hand all the students I’d been in class with before.

While most of the newcomers were Black and had previously attended Coleman, Harrison, and T.T. Minor, there was also a sprinkling of new White kids. They were amazingly similar to the White kids I already knew at Madrona—the children of professors, or at the very least, of professionals—relatively studious, reasonably compliant, and reserved. My guess is that most were denizens of the northern reach of the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt who had previously gone to McGilvra. But there may have been another small influx as well. The middle school component of the plan was entwined with a desegregation plan, which had been drawn up in part as mandatory, but the mandatory component had been challenged by a legal decision on a suit brought forward by some Central Area parents, and to keep some semblance of progress in this arena, the School District may have recruited a limited number of volunteers. It was in this manner that several newer White kids—children of professors, or at least of professionals—had landed in the same portables with me.

The desegregation plans and the middle school plan seemed jumbled together and as sixth graders we didn’t know or care which was which or really how or why any of this was happening. But there was definitely more to it than us just learning to not call the Learning Resource Center a library or losing valuable play spaces to portables. For one thing, the portables were connected by a partitioned walkway so that our teachers could engage in team teaching. What this meant for us is that sometimes the students would swap places in the portables by means of the connecting passage and sometimes the teachers would trade places while we stayed put, but of course behind the scenes there

111. Pieroth, Desegregating the Public Schools, 461.
112. Pieroth, Desegregating the Public Schools, 461.
113. Susan Stier, Middle Schools in Perspective (Seattle: Seattle Public Schools, 1973), 6.
was much more going on. The teachers, Miss Kneutel and Mr. Vannoy, were very new teachers and progressively minded. I remember they came to my house at least once and conferred with my Dad on materials and content for a sex education module they were planning. One upshot of this input was that our class was able to see some footage of sex cells at work and the penetration of the ovum by the sperm cell, and, if I remember correctly, we saw some footage of a baby quietly nestled in a womb. What was most memorable, however, had nothing to do with any footage. Prepared as teachers try to be, especially new ones, and even more so in regard to controversial content, they can never be ready for everything. After describing some of the mechanisms of sex in formal terms including penis, vagina and ovum, Miss Kneuttel had invited questions. The most physically precocious girl in the class, Tonisha—she was more developed than most ninth graders—quietly asked, “Does it feel good?” The teacher blushed. Surprisingly, the class did not laugh, but collected its breath, waiting for the answer, all the while closely observing the blush.

Pretending she hadn’t heard correctly, or perhaps trying to buy some time to respond, she asked, “What?”

Tonisha simply asked again, in the same quiet and soft voice. “Does it feel good?”

The teacher then provided a fairly clever answer. “Some people say it does.” But the intense blush had given her away, and now the whole class knew that the teacher had done it. It was pretty clear what Tonisha was up to with her question. More perceptive than the rest of us she may also have guessed at the other half of the equation. Miss Kneuttel and Mr. Vannoy were married one or two years after, and had long, outstanding careers, with many years spent teaching at Madrona.

Whether it was the portables swallowing up the playground, or just a function of age, play in sixth grade was no longer what it had been. The only real fun I remember was the free hour at the end of the day—I don’t think it was every day, and it may have just been on Friday. That was when the students in the two portables could mingle and choose their own activities, though within the confines of the portables. It was always extremely loud and sometimes I joined in the racket, especially when flicking thick triangles of many-times-folded paper over fingers raised as goalposts. Sometimes the radio was allowed, and I remember the Jackson Five blaring out on more than one occasion. Most times, music or no music, I just read. None of my best play buddies from previous years were in my class, but a couple of girls were, and sometimes we ended up at the same tables during this free time. One thing I was totally oblivious to, however, was that the most physically precocious girl in the class, the very same one who had asked, “Does it
feel good?” always found nice things to say to me, the smallest boy in the class, and often ended up at the table where I was. I didn’t really notice or think about her saying how smart I was, or how well dressed I was (and believe me this was a real stretch) until near the end of the year when the teachers organized a class dinner at a Mexican restaurant. Not all the students went, and the teachers provided some of the transportation. In the carpool scheme, Miss Kneuttel picked me up second in her red Maverick, and though I don’t remember who filled the front seat at the next stop, Tonisha was already in the back seat with me, and again kept finding ways to say nice things about me. Her attentions were all lost on me. Why?

I could reduce it to the obvious, and say it was because my eyes were elsewhere: on the only girl in class as small as me, one of the new volunteer White transfer kids. But that only begs the question. Why was I attracted to the small, totally undeveloped White girl with no interest in me, and not to the Black girl that I actually spent time with, whose company I enjoyed, and who signaled that she liked me? I have no answer, only suspicions. It was a preference paralleled by an equally unexamined taste in radio stations. My radio stations of choice were the mainstream top-forty stations, KJR and KOL, which played rock and pop, with some R&B and soul mixed in. I never tuned my dial to KYAC, the local soul radio station, but the fact that I know it was on the dial at 1460 and that I can still sing the jingo “KYAC, Soul Radio!” tells you how much I heard it. KYAC was a real presence for some in Madrona—my sister and her friends played it, it could be heard blaring from radios at Madrona beach, and it was the only station I ever heard at 34th and James. But at home, when the choice was mine to make, and without giving it a second thought, I played stations aimed at a different audience.

In the fall afternoons that year, our band continued to expand our underground forts, digging in the cool air sometimes right up until dark. Such dedication proved the undoing for our deepest fort. Late one afternoon, we thought we detected a neighbor on 36th at her kitchen window watching us as we climbed down the ivy on a retaining wall to leave our digging for the day, and our fear was confirmed when we next arrived to dig and found the boards stacked up and the hole filled in with dirt. I have no idea if some neighborhood semaphore system was in place that we didn’t know about, but the very next weekend Bradley’s Dad discovered the cave under the clubhouse, and made him fill it back in. Disappointed but undaunted, we brainstormed and scouted the neighborhood for sites for a new fort and in October started digging one along the trail connecting the dead ends of 35th and 34th.
The same month we started that fort—October 1970—was also the month that Halloween died. Its death was fraught in advance by ill omen, and maybe we should have expected it. Starting as early as September, Ty kept excitedly telling us how his Dad had promised him money to buy a costume. He kept talking about what he was going to be, often changing his mind, and as Halloween drew nearer and nearer, he kept telling us that his Dad was going to give him the money for it in just a day or two. We even walked twice with him all the way down Cherry to the second-floor apartments where his Dad lived, above the fuel store just before 23rd Avenue. Both times nobody was home—or at least there was no answer. Halloween was getting closer and the days were getting shorter. By Halloween afternoon, the rest of us had all made our costumes, but Ty, who had relied on the promised money, had nothing. When he finally admitted that it wasn’t going to happen, my brother and I roped my mom into helping us, and since Ty’s heart was so set on a store-bought costume, she agreed to fund it. We piled into the Gorman Gasper and drove straightaway to Wigwam. The plundered shelf at the micro-emporium of cheap goods had only one thing in Ty’s size: a witch costume with a black dress and a green mask with hair-sprouting warts. But at this late hour, it was witch or nothing. So, witch it was.

Maybe it was the bad karma of wearing a Wigwam witch costume, but for the first time ever, Halloween was more tricks than treat. Our little band set out down 35th and had gone only a few blocks, greedily piling candy into our bags, when some teenagers, who were not even in costumes, came running towards us and ripped the bags out of our hands. One was even Ty’s cousin, and when Ty took off his mask to object, things just got worse. What was Ty doing being all dressed up like a witch!? Was he some kind of Boodie Buster!? I don’t remember where we rounded up some new empty bags, but it was early enough in the evening for us to start off again, and this time we dove straight down to 36th where we guessed we would be safe from further assault. We guessed wrong. We had barely made it past Columbia when a different pack of kids ran up and tore the bags—with barely anything in them—out of our hands. The second band of marauders ran helter-skelter down the street, shouting and laughing loudly. Ty was crying and bitterly tore off his costume and next thing we knew he and his older brother set out to the north screaming that they were going to snatch some bags of their own. My brother and I and Desmond all headed back up the steep hill towards to our houses in utter defeat. When my brother and I got back to our house, my parents were sitting near the fireplace in the library with my grandfather, talking about social issues. They seemed little concerned when we told them what had just happened, and quickly resumed their conversation.
Halloween was not the only sour note that autumn. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we enacted an impromptu cruelty on the politician’s two sons. We had made great progress on our new underground fort and several of us could now sit it in together with the planks pulled over the top. Bradley, J.J., Ty, and my brother were all there late one afternoon, not digging anymore, but just enjoying the fruits of our labors. With only the entry plank lifted, we were rolling up leaves like cigars and lighting them on fire and pretending to smoke them, and someone started to sing some Christmas Carols. The politician’s two sons, who only had to pad a short ways down our goat path from the corner of their yard, followed the sound of the songs and discovered us in our fort. They wanted to join us, and we invited them in. I don’t know how we came to this fabulous idea, or how we signaled to each other to do it, but we started leaving the fort, one at a time. Then, when the politician’s sons were the only ones left inside, we slid the last plank over the opening, and shut them in. We then stood on the planks and started loudly dropping clumps of dirt on top. Not surprisingly, they screamed and hollered for all they were worth. The cries were of course were muffled by all the earth and boards. I don’t know how long we kept them there before we ran off laughing. Right afterward, I felt bad, no matter how much I still detested the two boys. If I had known about our neighbor Rhinehart’s stint in isolation blackout and injections at Walla Walla I might have considered it to be at about the same level of cruelty. I never visited that fort again.

I could describe a host of neighborhood cruelties for the following months in ample detail and depth, but after what I’ve already described, the cumulative effect of episodes is likely to prove wearisome—a bit like reading the Marquis de Sade, if of a more puerile nature. Let a sample list, then, suffice: a new, problematic family moved in near 31st and Spring, but its members wandered more than the other families, and shook me down both on 34th near Spring and at Cherry near Empire, and twice attempted to steal our cowardly Doberman right from our yard; returning from the Torchlight parade by bus, my brother, Bradley, and I provided spectacular entertainment value that included hair-flipping and a slap; a friend killed another neighbor’s dog by dropping acid onto it from an upstairs window each time it broke into their garbage; I ridiculed a kid from the new problem family that was trying out for little league and connived to get him kicked off the team; I got high-kneed and trampled so hard at home plate at a Garfield baseball diamond that I had to pull my cheek out of my braces; and my friends and I launched berries and eggs through the slightly opened windows of the politician’s house while the family was away.

Interestingly, the summer after sixth grade, I experienced an alternate reality that made me puzzle over this other cruel reality I was coming to know far too well. Our next-door
neighbor—who was now probably nineteen or twenty—had a summer job helping run the Parks program at Brighton Playfield in the south end, just to the east of Rainier Avenue. He was short a few players for the softball teams and recruited my brother, myself, and some of our band of friends. None of us had any transportation of course so he drove us down and back for every practice and game in his used old, blue Oldsmobile that always smelled like a weird mix of French-fries and the tree-shaped air fresheners that dangled under his dashboard. The practices didn’t take all day of course, so we spent most of our time hanging around with kids from the area, playing ping pong, basketball, or even roaming into the nearby neighborhood to raid fruit trees while he worked his shift.

Entirely new to me in my summer of playing softball at Brighton was the blend of other kids. It wasn’t like Madrona School, where most of the kids were Black—of which many were middle class, some not quite middle class, and others downright poor—while a small remainder of White kids, and an even smaller remainder of Asian American kids, came from middle class households supported by professional careers and incomes to match. At Brighton there was no majority, let alone a supermajority. The teams were a fairly even blend of Pacific Islander, Black, and White. What is more, nobody seemed more well off than anyone else, and they all seemed to have very similar attitudes. It was pretty clear to me that nobody dealt out much shit because if they did, they knew they were going to get some shit back. This was my first extended immersion in a social environment where no single group dominated, and where there was no underlying divergence of wealth, education, opportunity, and comportment. I knew there were tensions of course, and perhaps if I had grown up there rather than just played summer softball, I might have seen it as far less rosy. But it also seemed to me that it mirrored what I had seen in the experience of the next-door neighbor who had brought us there. He had grown up in Madrona just a few years before me, and all through high school he and his older brothers had White, Black and Asian American friends from Franklin that came over, and they always hung out as casually as could be. There was one who stood out in all their conversations as the cool of the cool, named Sligh—although I am not even sure if that is how his name was spelled. Other people very close to his age have written about growing up in Madrona, and at least two suggest that this is more than just idealization on my part. Stephanie Oliver, who eventually became an editor for *Esquire*, and attended Madrona until 1960, described a similar situation, as did Aaron Dixon in his memoir. At Brighton what I saw, or at least what I thought I saw, was a successful blending of groups, and in looking at my neighbors who were just advancing out of high school into adulthood, I

thought I saw that a window had existed where harmony and friendship persisted through high school and even beyond.

Which made Meany-Madrona Middle School the next year seem all the worse by comparison. And no matter how the School District baked Madrona into the name with a hyphen, for me it was still a matter of attending a different school in a different building nearly two miles away at 21st and Republican. The middle school concept as a progressive educational initiative was still moving forward, and what this meant to me as a student was that my classes were again in rooms connected to each other by swinging double doors, genuflections were made in the direction of team teaching, and I was an experimental guinea pig for learning at my own pace. The students were divided into two “houses,” with each “house” occupying one of the two main hallways of the single-story structure. Each hallway led to a main concourse, with the school office at one end and the gym at the other. The execution of the middle school concept was still entangled with the desegregation plan, which had hit yet another legal delay just one month before school started.115 This partial middle school rollout combined with the snag in the implementation of bussing created a paradoxical effect at Meany: an actual increase in segregation. For Washington Junior High, with a minority enrollment of nearly ninety-four percent had been closed the year before, with all of its students and future feeder students now assigned to Meany-Madrona. Students from Colman, Minor, Leschi and Madrona, all with high Black enrollments, were also funneled to the school at 21st and Republican.116

The increased segregation and amplified concentration of kids from the poorest parts of the neighborhoods, along with the pubertal pressure to social conformity, conspired to create a singularly hostile environment for me that year. It was not as if I was new to mostly Black schools—Madrona, after all, was eighty-four percent Black when I started, and only fluctuated mildly over the years. But at Madrona, I had grown up knowing the kids—even the ones who were not my friends—and they had grown up knowing me. Economically, too, a greater portion of the kids had come from more stable homes. Not so, many of the kids who would have gone to Washington, and for the meanest of them—of which there seemed to be no shortage—I was a new target, and one to be tested right away. My memory of the first few days is a jumbled blur of getting bumped and knocked around in the hallways almost casually by a bunch of people I did not know. I responded

115. Stier, Middle Schools in Perspective, 19.
for the most part in the non-violent way I had been raised to, but this did not seem to help much. Less than two weeks into the year, in the blind alley of a hallway that led to the gym, a student I did not know hassled me for no apparent reason (this was, sadly, typical), and this time, rather than just accept it, I tackled him. His friends who had been enjoying the spectacle wasted no time in jumping me as well, and as I lay on the ground, each gave me a farewell kick before walking away. Probably the only reason I remember this particular incident was not the appalling lack of a fair fight, the demeaning nature of being hassled, or even the punches and kicks, but the fact that a shirt I had bought with my own money—with a colorful purple and white floral pattern I liked—not at all like the drab clothes my parents inflicted on me—had been ripped in the scuffle. Never mind that I had bought it at Chubby and Tubby’s, which in rank of quality was only one grade above Wigwam. The fact was, I did not start the fight and I felt there should be reparation: I wanted money to replace the shirt. The next day I went to the school office at lunch with my torn shirt in my hand as an exhibit, and within a week or so, when the secretary saw that I was not going to stop coming back each day until I actually spoke to the Principal, she finally made an appointment. The Principal was a youngish, light-skinned woman who looked almost seven feet tall. She gazed down at the shirt from her great height, explained that I was not likely to get money for it, and even inquired if my mother knew how to sew. As I pressed my point about fairness, I could tell that I was just a nuisance to be dealt with. For her, I probably was barely even that, for after all, she was responsible for the seventh and eighth grade portions of this middle school program, for implementing its progressive educational vision, and for trying to hold the school together while the desegregation program worked through its legal hurdles. While I went on about my shirt and rights, I felt that she was having a conversation with herself behind her eyes, and that if it had anything to do with what I was saying, it was probably something to the effect that she felt my parents could clearly afford to buy me another shirt, probably more so than the parents of the kid who had ripped it—which all may well have been true—but to me, that was not the point.

Much later in the year, the Principal would grace one of my entire classrooms with another example of her glorious condescension. The class’s reaction, however, was far better than mine: as soon as she had left the room the guiltiest culprits laughed and most of the class along with them. To what did we owe the gift of her company and her high umbrage? Part of it was probably her unwillingness to acknowledge the realities of the school that fell rather short of its high ambitions, and one such shortfall had been brought to her attention the previous day in a very acute way. Our regular teacher for last period had been out that day, and a substitute had filled in. The substitute’s only task was to show a film. Sounds easy enough. But he didn’t know the students in this room. As soon as he pulled
the curtains shut, turned the lights out, and started the film, objects started to make sporadic bangs and thunks as they struck walls, chairs, even flesh. Anyone with an inkling of sense—and I’d like to think that included me—put their hands over their heads and ducked low as the air rustled with whizzes of items and arms in motion and grunts and catcalls of satisfaction. When the teacher turned the light on the first time, the students—targets and throwers alike—were all sitting upright, motionless, the image of attention. He chastised the group, then started the film again—the result being the same—only this time, when he turned on the light one student was holding his head by his eye and had blood trickling down his cheek. I can’t remember how we got to the end of the film, because all I remember after seeing the blood was what happened the next day, when the tall Principal, unaccompanied by any teacher, strode into our class at the top of the hour. She started as calmly as she could manage yet even then her ire was barely concealed. Words like disappointed and “never so” preceded her recounting of what she had seen the day before, the likes of which she claimed to have never seen in all her years. After leaving our classroom, the substitute—a skinny, long-haired guy—had opened the door to the administration office and thrown his keys across the receptionist’s counter, shouting, “Don’t ever, ever, EVER ask me to teach here again!!” Hearing the raised voice, the Principal immediately came out of her office, but he was already gone, and she could only watch out the window as he ran to his car and raced off in his VW bug. She wanted to hear from us what had happened, but nobody was talking. Maybe someone said something laconic like “We watched a film” but I honestly don’t remember. We had to listen to her for at least another twenty minutes, and though I can’t remember her exact words, she was talking down from her great, educated height, lamenting that the students had discredited the school, and though she might not have used the exact words, by implication, their race. The stakes were high for her, personally, first as a middle-class college-educated Black woman, but second as an administrator in charge of a school with eyes trained on it from all over the city. The gist of the message, which grew more animated and repetitive as it went on, was that we were supposed to feel shame and learn from this and do better. As soon as she left the room, there were a few back of the throat laughs and the class clown, who just happened to be as light-skinned as she was, said, “Well, ain’t she just all high and mighty!” Our regular teacher arrived a few minutes later, probably having come down from the Principal’s office, and after a confirmation that we had listened to what the Principal had said, we learned something about marine biology that I have long since forgotten.

If the incident with the fleeing substitute had caused her to be so upset, I can only imagine how she must have felt about the Friday just before spring break, when she had to unexpectedly close the school down early. Nothing in advance had indicated to me how different
this day was to be, for it had started more or less like any other. But by ten a.m., fire trucks had come twice to put out trash fires, and there were rumors of fights and of White kids getting beat up—rumors, I say, because I didn’t see anything like it that day. But something was up, because the fire truck stayed at the curb after putting out the second fire, and school was abruptly dismissed before noon. This was all fine for students who lived close enough to walk home or who could get rides from their parents. I was not one of these, and my clearest recollection of the day, beyond the uncertainty and buzz surrounding the morning fires, was whiling away time waiting for a bus with one other White student named Becky (an eighth grader known only in passing) in a classroom that looked out on the spot where the buses pulled up. We were in the room with Miss Osaka, the math teacher, and the three of us feigned a semblance of normalcy as best we could, chatting and even playing some math games—essentially doing anything except talking about the reason we were there. Things had quieted down of course because nobody was left at school, and the school’s security guards—both dressed like Lou Rawls, one with a long, brown leather coat, the other with a short black leather jacket, dropped in now and again to join us in whiling away the time. Under the watchful eye of a teacher, with the door locked, and one eye peeled on the window where the buses would pull up, we waited to go home and start spring break. Sometime later I overheard some kids call that Friday “Rabbit Day” and talked about how they looked forward to it again next year. I have never seen reference to this anywhere before or since, but my guess is that those kids didn’t just make it up.

I had two ways to get to school that year. The preferred route was available on some days but not others. This involved walking down to Terrace—either via James and down 32nd, or via Cherry and backtracking on 36th—to the house of Stephen Smith, a kid who was probably having just as little fun at Meany as I was. His Dad was Cuban and Black, and his Mom, who had come from Hawaii, had Puerto Rican heritage. His Dad had been active in the same civil rights organizations as my parents and would go on to serve as a judge on the Washington State Supreme Court. The family lived in one of the few modern houses in the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt and it was to my mind one of the coolest houses ever. Built quietly onto the hillside with natural tones and a low profile, it blended with the trees, but it was the inside that always blew me away. The living room had a loft, the doors were Japanese paper-panel doors, and the most amazing feature to my seventh-grade mind was the radio that was connected to speakers in every room. After I arrived, Stephen and I would wait for his Dad to finish getting ready to leave, and to this day I can recite a radio ad for AAMCO Transmissions. Stephen and I were assigned different “houses” at Meany, so we were not in the same classes, but we often made our way to school together that year. He had gone to Leschi, but I believe he was equally flummoxed
by the previously unknown students at Meany, who, on account of his wavy hair and manner of dress, naturally tagged him as mixed, if not White.

On mornings when Stephen’s Dad could not drive us to school, Stephen walked up from his house, and then we would set off on foot together to Madrona to catch the school bus that left from 32nd and Union. Once there, we could endure the daily ignominy. I have no idea how the pattern was established, but what is certain is that I cannot remember it ever looking any different. It was important to wait in exactly the right place for the bus because it established position for where you would sit on the bus. For some, it was important to be close to where the bus’s front door would open and let students board. For others, it did not matter. And so, anyone driving past the bus zone would have seen a smaller cluster of White and mixed kids close to the curb nearer the Union end of the stop, with a looser scattering of Black kids trailing towards Spring. Although there was no shortage of seats, why was it so important for the White kids to get on first? Because the spatial arrangement for the duration of the ride was always the same: White kids at the front. Even if there were open seats sprinkled at the back of the bus, White kids remained at the front. Although nobody talked about it, everybody on the bus, the drivers included, knew that this was how it played out. Anyone White venturing to the back was likely to pay the price in hassle, humiliation, and spectacle. I always found it ironic, with my little knowledge of Rosa Parks, that the Black kids wanted to be at the back of the bus, but with my little knowledge of Rosa Parks I also knew it wasn’t a particularly good feeling to know that you were expected to occupy a certain place on a bus if your skin was a certain color.

The routine for the bus ride at the end of the day was similar, although there was no curbside huddling as the buses sat there waiting for us by the time we were let out of school. You just had to get to the bus quickly if you wanted to secure a seat at the front. One day, I was late and after dashing onto the bus just before it left the Meany curbside, I made the mistake of challenging the status quo. It was a mistake I would not repeat. Out of breath, I hopped up the steps, only to realize that not only were all the side-facing seats at the front filled, but so too were the first two rows of forward-facing seats. The pale, sheepish front of the bus was packed. There were of course open seats to the back. And then I saw that one of these was next to my friend, Ty. I was relieved. Now, rather than stand uncomfortably for the duration of the ride and suffering from the humiliation of my front-of-the-bus status huddled up with the other White kids, I walked back, sat next to my friend, and said “Hey, Ty.” He started to get it from his neighbors with comments such as, “You’re going to let that White boy sit next to you?” “And he knows you?” I sat silent and looked ahead, and so, I imagine, did he, although, since I was staring straight
ahead, I wasn’t sure. The voices didn’t stop. This was bound to liven up the otherwise dull ride back to Madrona. “Aren’t you going to do something?” “You know him?” The ride took forever. Two twelve year olds, who used to be great friends—even just a year before—sitting side by side as they had so many times before—it should have been perfectly fine and natural—but the truth was clear: it was all different now.

Ty did nothing during the ride. I guess that is to his credit. He waited until he got off the bus. As soon as we stepped off, he started to shout at me, switching from being directly in my face or shrieking at the side of my face. He shouted at me as I walked crosswise across the upper Madrona playground, and he continued to shout at me as we walked crosswise the next block across Madrona playfield, where we had played on the little league team together for two years. The only words I remember, though there must have been more, are “Don’t you ever sit next to me!” I might have responded, but I am not sure. I only know that at first I was very sad. When he was done shouting at me and went his own way, my sadness did not diminish but other feelings joined it in a soup of feelings: disappointment, betrayal, anger. Evidently, I had been a White boy all along and was just too stupid to realize it.

To crown the glorious seventh grade experience, Cerberus, our cowardly Doberman, died an extremely gruesome death. After she had vomited intermittently for a day or two, we took her to the vet. This finely trained professional diagnosed it as a symptom of morning sickness due to a false pregnancy and assured us that all was fine. What none of us realized, was that she had been drinking out of our backyard pond, perhaps to satisfy a thirst generated by the false pregnancy. And what none of us further realized was that immediately after the tree service had sprayed our trees with pesticides some days before, a heavy rain had rinsed the poison right off the leaves and into the pond. Though the vomiting increased, we steadfastly relied on the vet’s diagnosis. Then, one morning, when I came down to feed her before going to school, she stood up trembling to greet me, then her front legs buckled, and out of her mouth spurted a rank green liquid festooned with green giblets. It was only then that I looked down and saw that her bedding was already soaked with the same foul broth. I summoned my parents, and though normally I would have stayed home to go to the vet with one of them, our class was going on a big outing to the Red Barn Ranch outside the city, and it seemed a shame to miss it, and there really wasn’t much time to choose as Stephen would be knocking at the front door at any minute to walk to the bus. I told him what had happened, and I was quiet and sad all day. I have always been grateful to him for letting me be quietly sad on the walk to school and for not telling me how I should feel.
Some things on 35th Avenue remained more or less the same that year. Rhinehart, who had staged marches the previous year when once again conviction lay under threat of being reinstated, finally had the sentence vacated permanently. Perhaps it was a victory celebration of sorts, but it was about this time that he painted his house bright white with sparkles embedded in the paint and aimed spotlights up at the house. The Williams’ worked hard with other groups to establish the Seattle Folk Life Festival. My Mom, who had stopped working for Urban Construction Company, took a new job for a Black-owned credit union that had its offices on 17th and Union.

The biggest change, which came just near the end of the school year, was that the politician next door—who had the previous year lost his re-election campaign—had moved. The new family had four boys, one my age, and they had lived somewhere in the Mann neighborhood before buying this house. A mixed-race couple, the Dad was a jazz pianist, and his wife, in addition to looking after the four boys, managed some of the Dad’s business dealings. We did not see them much the first month. Nor did they see much of us. It was one of those gray June months, cool and rainy, and I learned much later that their initial nickname for us was “The Hermit People” because the only time they saw us was going from the house to the car or from the car to the house.

Rain aside, I had been spending more time indoors, and even when I was outside, I was spending less time in the immediate neighborhood. When indoors, I spent a lot of time listening to music—no longer just the radio, with KISW, the new FM station as my preferred station—but to records, which I had begun to buy. Suddenly, any money I made babysitting, cutting lawns or pulling weeds, went to buying albums by groups such as Led Zeppelin, the Who, and Black Sabbath. When I learned how much farther my money went by buying used albums, I started to make my way to the U-District on a regular basis. Of course, I had to strategize a route so that my cash and I could make it there safely. The trick, as I learned, was to make the trip early on a Saturday morning, taking the 12 E. Cherry, then transferring downtown. 34th was empty, Cherry was empty, and the buses were empty. Sometimes I made it there so early that one record store, Honest John’s, was not even open yet, as it only nominally kept to the hours on its sign. Such bus routes at the right time of day provided a kind of magic portal, a way to safely move through barriers from one space to another. That June, I used the 12 E. Cherry in exactly the same way to attend a typing class at Garfield. I am not sure why I had never thought of this sooner—maybe I hadn’t wanted to spend my candy money on bus fare, or maybe waiting for a bus made me feel like a sitting duck, or maybe I didn’t want to lose time, as hoofing the distance down to Garfield was usually quicker, unless I timed the bus just right. Sometimes that June, if it was raining, I hoofed the distance anyway, as I had learned that
rain also provided a layer of protection against the usual kinds of hassles. The typing class at Garfield was in fact a blast. The Principal’s daughter, Mary Bass, was in the class and I am pretty sure I was the only boy, and definitely the only kid who was not in high school. I had not laughed that much in a class since the early days at Madrona, and the fun we had made any vulnerable minutes at the bus stop near 23rd well worth the risk.

The bus was not the only key to escaping the immediate neighborhood that I discovered that year. A fast-moving bike could also be a key, but I had to deftly apply it at the right doorway. It needed to be applied to the north barrier, which had two critical zones: the house on 35th near Union, and beyond that, anywhere on Madrona Drive after 34th curved into it. The idea was to slip past these barriers to get to beaches that were not Madrona beach, such as Madison and Denny Blaine, and even the hidden beaches at street ends such as Highland and Harrison. To an untrained eye, the most obvious doorway to the green world of safety to the north would be to drop down Cherry at 35th, turning north at 36th or 37th, but whether going up or down Cherry, even one block of its nineteen percent grade is about as unpleasant on a bike as it comes. The first through street that is not a deathly incline is Pike, so once I was strong enough to rocket my way quickly past the house at 35th and Union it was no problem to cruise down Pike, zigzag east and north, to emerge near Epiphany Church and squirt safely across Madrona Drive just past Denny Blaine pond. Once through the barrier, any number of routes could be taken to the beaches. I also used this key to pursue the northwest extension of the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt as it wound through Washington Park, the Arboretum, and Montlake, eventually leading to the UW campus, and best of all to my mind, the University District with its alluring used record stores.

September 6, 1972 was the first day of the new school year at a school everybody still called Meany, but which was officially Meany-Madrona Middle School. By then, I’d made friends with the new family next door, and most days I walked to the bus with the boy my age, Sean. Stephen did not join us, as he had transferred out of the public schools to attend Lakeside. At the bus stop many of the same cast of characters showed up and boarding of the bus followed the established social mores, with eighth graders modeling the rules for the new seventh graders. When the loaded bus pulled up to Meany, though, it was no longer just one of a few buses. After waiting a block back to gain its turn curbside right next to the school, our bus pulled out and then took its place in a yellow wall powered by growling diesel engines that spewed blasts of noxious exhaust each time the next bus pulled out. Administrators, teachers, and the fashionably dressed plainclothes security
guards facilitated the exit from the buses. After many years of court delays, mandatory bussing had finally materialized, and now streams of White kids poured off most of the buses, flowed across the skinny parking strip and equally skinny sidewalk, then trundled into the twin double-door entrances on East Republican.

The school district’s Middle School Desegregation Program was now in full swing, with no new legal challenge successfully blocking it. Meany-Madrona was only one of several middle schools involved in this plan, with minority students from Meany-Madrona bussing out to schools like Eckstein and White students from schools like Eckstein bussing to Meany-Madrona. Although at the time I knew bussing was imminent, it had been imminent for several years now and I was pretty doubtful that it would actually happen. And even if it did happen, I didn’t expect there to be much difference at my school—after all, the purely voluntary White transfers at Madrona in the sixth grade had made little difference either in classroom mix or social dynamics. I had no idea about the district’s numeric goals and even if I had I surely wouldn’t have cared.

What I in no way anticipated was the effect this mass daily transportation of nearly one thousand pubertal bodies would have on me. Seattle’s population was nearly ninety percent White, but that was not the Seattle I knew. The Seattle I knew was the Central Area, where the majority of Seattle’s 28,000 African Americans lived in 1970. Suddenly, I was in a school that was sixty percent White. My reaction the first few days was disbelief and shock. How was this possible? Where had all these White kids come from? Whether moving through the halls or sitting in a classroom or milling around outside at lunchtime it was all visually disorienting and even audibly strange. The first few days, there was also an eerie absence that was also strange. Unlike the previous year, when students had bumped into me and harassed me for no particular reason, I received no such treatment and did not find myself scrambling with trepidation from place to place. This was also my first year in a class where I was not a visible minority. And it wasn’t long before I learned that many of these White kids were nothing like the ones I’d grown up with. They were not all the children of professors or professionals, reserved, and acquiescent. Many of the boys were not willing to put up with harassment and were not reluctant to hit back when hassled. This too was a revelation to me, and liberating. It is not as if there were no tensions in the school body that year, but the dynamic was different: I was not in a hopeless situation. Perhaps for this reason I got in more fights than

117. Stier, Middle Schools in Perspective, 21.
ever. After one of these, stupidly fought in the main intersection near the main office, I found myself excused from class twice a week for counseling sessions with other students who were getting into fights. There were about five of us in the group, and I had fought with nearly all of them. At least two were Native Americans and the others were Black. At first, most of it involved talking and for the first time in my life I let the others do the talking. The Native Americans, who had previously lived in Whatcom County, talked about how they used to go to downtown Bellingham to beat up White kids. Somehow, I learned that one of the boys called dill pickles Alligator Dicks. (I challenge you to forget that image now, if you can.) Our counselor was Mr. Callahan, who had long hair and a broad mustache, and had actually attended Meany himself. In fact, he had lived on 35th Avenue only two blocks from my house in the early 1960s, and while pursuing his first career in forestry had nursed an orphaned bear cub. Not that I knew any of this at the time, of course. About our second or third session, Mr. Callahan informed us that the group was too large and that one of us would have to leave. He said he felt uncomfortable in making the decision, and he left the office for five minutes so we could decide who it would be. We talked about it as a group, and as a consequence, when Mr. Callahan came into the room, we all jokingly grabbed him from behind and told him that he was the one leaving. Interestingly, I didn't fight with any of the kids in that group again, and as far as I can recall, got into no more fights that entire year.

The commitment to the progressive middle school educational platform was much more developed than the previous year. The double-doors connecting classrooms swung open more than ever, with students encouraged to learn at their own pace and to manage their own time. On Mondays, in four subjects—I think these were Social Studies, Math, Language Arts and Science—we were given our assignments and had all week to complete them. We were not restricted to any single room for working on them. My usual practice was to race through all the assignments as fast as I could—I was usually done by Wednesday—which meant I was at liberty to roam from room to room, tell jokes, and generally hang out with other kids once I was done. No sooner had this pattern emerged than the teachers tried to harness my energies for helping others with their work, so I pretended to do this, and still had fun telling jokes and generally hanging out with friends. I reached the acme of efficiency in this model when it came to Math. After passing a test for each assigned module, I could progress to the next module. I soon skipped the annoying work for the modules because I had figured out that I could retake the variants of the tests, whose questions were all similar, until I passed. It was far less work to quickly flunk the various versions of the test than to complete the work for the module. On paper, then, I was right on track, but what it really meant is that I did not learn the material well at all. In fact, if the pain experienced in ninth grade algebra is any indication, I had even managed to forget some handling of basic things like fractions and decimals.
If the middle school educational initiative proved in some ways detrimental to my academic progress, the desegregation component of it was a boon to me socially. It was not that I made any great friends to spend time with outside of school, but more a matter of feeling at ease in chatting, joking, and even just moving around from place to place. It was possible to argue in a joking way which was the better band, The Rolling Stones or Led Zeppelin, or hum the main riff from Edgar Winter’s *Frankenstein*, and know it would be recognized. Sean and I even went to Seattle Totems hockey games knowing that a few of the bussed students from Meany might be there, and when they were, we would casually hang out and do stupid things with them like running around the top of the Coliseum concourse. Sean and I once even walked on a whim one day in the pouring rain all the way from Meany to Broadmoor, the gated community near the lake at Madison, to knock on a student’s door to say hi. Of course, we never made it past the gatehouse.

It was a year that showed me possible worlds I hadn’t known existed, and the following summer I spent more time than ever speeding through magic portals on my bike to get to Madison beach, Harrison beach or to the U. District and its used record stores. I also explored the Great Olmstedian Greenbelt by myself, by bike or on foot, dropping below 35th into the lush labyrinth of switchback streets and quiescent houses, a world that was tranquil, green, and mostly devoid of people. If I spent time playing in the immediate neighborhood, it was on the block and one-half of 35th between the dead end and James. It is telling that I never even met the new people who had moved into the houses directly behind us on 34th. A kid named Marcellus lived in one house and I only know that because his Dad used to yell his name in frustration. The people in the other house had several foster children, and I never troubled to meet them, either. With no active friends east or west of 35th, and none north of Cherry or south of the dead end, my immediate neighborhood had shrunk to the smallest dimensions since tricycle age.

Which brings us to the question: at the end of eighth grade, where would I go to high school? The natural progression from Meany was Garfield High, only twelve blocks from my house, but it was not yet part of any desegregation plan. To my mind, this meant it was quite likely to be a repeat of my miserable seventh grade year at Meany. My parents were also concerned (far more than I was) about the quality of education to be had at Garfield. Regardless of what the precise concerns were, my parents and I were not alone. In the five-year span between 1970 and 1975, nearly 1,600 students opted to transfer to private schools rather than attend Garfield. It was not just Whites, but many Blacks

120. Susann Shephard, *Out-Migration of Students From Seattle Public Schools to Non Public Schools* (Seattle: Seattle Public Schools, 1977), 22.
and Asian Americans, too, with others requesting, and getting, transfers to other public high schools.\textsuperscript{121} It was a vicious cycle of course, and I was about to contribute to it, and in 1973, the year I would have started at Garfield, its Black enrollment reached an all-time peak of eighty-one percent.\textsuperscript{122} I knew other kids that had already transferred to private school—mostly friends from 36th—but they transferred to Lakeside and Helen Bush, very elite and expensive, and there was no choice for me, really. Garfield, with the prospect of seventh grade all over again, or Seattle Prep—never mind that the latter was Catholic and all boys at least I wouldn’t be singled as I felt I had been in seventh grade. To get there, though, I had to catch the city bus before 7 a.m. Getting back again by city bus late each afternoon, that choice in many ways sealed my withdrawal from Madrona. The bus and my direct walk to and from it were perfect two-a-day portals for letting me be in the neighborhood, but not of the neighborhood.

Epilog

As early as the mid 1970s, when effective enforcement of non-discriminatory housing and lending laws began to make themselves felt, and more money was made available to support purchases and rehabilitation of houses in the neighborhood, the re-gentrification of Madrona began. We saw it on our stub of a street when a childless power-couple bought the gigantic house next door. And though we rarely saw either of the two lawyers, we did see the brick wall they quickly erected as a substitute for the lawn that sloped down to the sidewalk. Evidently it was a trendsetter, because brick walls now stand in front of each house on that side of the street—my house and the one to the north, replacing the sloped lawns that had been the vogue in the 1920s. Of course, new populations moving in mean other people moving out, and a lot of the Black population shifted further south in the city throughout the next few decades. Though not as swift a shift as the one between 1940 and 1970, Madrona has become increasingly well-heeled and White, with 34th no longer serving as an abrupt color line.

I worked as a waiter very close to Madrona for almost two decades, at a 24-hour breakfast house at 10th and Madison, and over the years had intermittent contact with people I had


\textsuperscript{122} Hanawalt, \textit{The History of Desegregation}, 9.
known or grown up with. More often than not, they recognized me before I recognized them. One of the players from little league recognized me and remembered me primarily because I was the only kid on the team who was willing to play catcher—something I had forgotten. Another kid from 34th who had moved right after kindergarten recognized me—I have no idea how—in the 1990s. He was a jazz trumpeter and had stopped by for a meal after playing. The would-be dog-thief my Dad had clobbered with the vacuum hose was sitting with a friend ordering food sometime in the 1980s and paused with an abrupt, quizzical look on his face when I came up to take their order. “I know you,” he said. “Where do I know you from?” I knew where I knew him from, but I wasn’t telling. When I delivered the food, he finally said. “Yeah. You were the librarian at Monroe.” Before I could speak up, his friend disagreed, and assured him that no prison librarian was going to be serving pancakes at no pancake house. I told him that I had not been a librarian at Monroe, and that maybe he knew me from somewhere else, but I still wasn’t telling where. On a Sunday morning sometime in the 1990s, I was chasing a dine-and-dasher down the empty streets. He was well over a foot taller than me, and I was chasing him mostly so I could let him know that I knew he was going to do that even before he had bolted for the door. A police car suddenly appeared in a walled parking lot just as I was catching up to him. It turns out my Dad’s friend, Luther, saw me in hot chase as he drove by, and had called the police. He later asked my Mom what exactly I planned to do if I caught the guy. I actually had no idea. One Easter Sunday, I was starting to take orders from a large family, and the Mom was asking one of the daughters a question, using the name Rhamelle. I looked at the Mom, and asked, “Is that a Rhamelle Junior?” She laughed and said yes, and I quickly confirmed that she was indeed the second-grade classmate who had won the five dollars from Mrs. Harris for remaining quiet one whole afternoon. In the early 1980s, I sometimes housesat for the parents of my earliest friend on 36th, and as I did not have a car, walked to catch the 2 Madrona bus at 34th and Union to get to work. One sunny afternoon, I ran into Desmond by his house on 34th, and then he shouted across to Ty, who came running over. Ty wanted to know if I would like to see his pit bulls, although he was just then very angry at one of them for having eaten its puppies. He evidently still had his love for animals.

At the edge of the Central Area, just down the street from both Mount Zion Baptist Church and the First AME, and with its round the clock hours, waiting tables at that pancake house put me into contact with people from all walks, including stock characters that make good copy like the drug-dealers at five a.m. or the church ladies in flowery regalia on Sundays. Mostly, though, it was just regular people, and how many of these customers were connected to each other didn’t dawn on me until the very late 1990s when I went to a service for one of my Mom’s friends. (Interestingly, the friend had been our neighbor
on 35th, but had not been a friend at the time. It was her dog, Queenie that had been fatally clubbed during a burglary.) My Mom had met Mildareen after retiring while both of them were working at a church thrift shop. Although I was doing my best to be appropriately solemn during the service, after I had recognized one or two customers, I found myself scanning the pews within my range of vision, looking to recognize more people that I had waited on over the years. I needn’t have bothered. At the reception it was like old-home week, with the element of mutual surprise not just on my side—they were equally surprised to see me out of context. There were cousins, friends, adult children, people I had waited on for years—but never all at once—and certainly prior to the service there had been no reason for me to even think of them in one big swoop. A few had resemblances that were clear when you saw them together—including in the most obvious cases, light skin and even freckles—but others had little physical resemblance at all. As someone who had grown up with one brother, one sister, and no cousins, and as someone who had pretty much ditched all his neighborhood connections, it was actually shocking to me. I was glad to know that Mildareen had lived in such a rich web of connections, and it was (as those things go) an enjoyable reception, but afterwards I could not help but feel a bit impoverished.

My Mom actually ended up with more lasting Madrona connections than anyone in our family, in spite of the fact that she moved to a rented triplex on 30th Avenue South, in Mount Baker in 1979. She had returned to working for Urban Construction at 12th and Jefferson, and one of her neighbors in the triplex was a former coworker at the Central Area Federal Credit Union where she had worked a few years before. Although she was no longer socially or politically active, she still ran casually into people she knew at the store and elsewhere, but she let her work as a bookkeeper (along with reading mysteries and doing jigsaw puzzles) fill up the majority of her time. After retirement she kept in touch with a few Madrona friends from the sixties such as Nan Petit and Carol Richman, and in the early nineties even went on a train trip from Seattle to Montreal with her friend Lillian. Lillian had moved to become an accountant for a church in South Central L.A. but had finally landed in Tehachapi where she ran her own accounting company. It was fun to drop my Mom off at the train station where Lillian had arrived on a train from California. They had kept in touch by phone for years, but this was the first time they had seen each other in person, and it clearly meant a lot to them both, and they both teared up. I saw a similar response when my Mom ran into an old PTA friend, Aki Kurose. Kurose was then undergoing chemotherapy, and it was a totally chance encounter outside the Odegaard undergraduate library on the UW campus. They sat down together, drank hot cocoa, and chatted for a good hour before saying goodbye.
Epilog’s Epilog and Disclaimer

Although I honor ambiguity and ambivalence, I know it is all too easy to be misconstrued. Hence the need for this second epilog and disclaimer.

Some people may read the foregoing and feel as though I am making a case for myself as a victim. Although there were certainly unpleasant incidents in my childhood, many turning on racial elements, this is not in any way meant as a poor-me story.

I could leave the neighborhood, and I did. I had even left it, psychologically, while I still lived there.

I had choices and relative freedom.

The problems I encountered could be avoided by simply moving. Moving into worlds of assumed White identity, not assigned White identity.

But what about people whose choices are limited and who have less relative freedom? Can they ever move so easily?
Methodology: AKA How I Wrote This

If you have made it this far, I can at least hope that you still have enough interest to learn a bit about how I came to write this personal micro-geography. I would like to think that my approach can provide others with methods for thinking in new ways about how and where they grew up. Most of us have a store of well-rehearsed childhood memories that we inflict on others over the years, so entrenched through repeated telling that they impede further reflection or memory. Though this book contains several such set pieces, many more were omitted, and I have pulled out all the stops to better contextualize the remaining ones through mapping, reading, and exercises in more acute remembering. The remembering that lies at the tips of our tongues begs to be challenged, and it can be countered by making room for less-readily remembered features of our experience. Though anything like a complete account of even the smallest bit of our past lies beyond possibility, a fuller accounting than what we supply from habit is still more likely to reveal disguised ambivalences and ambiguities, and alleviate some of the blindness due to a child’s inherent lack of historical perspective. Such fuller accounting might even help counter adult blindness.

A question that often bubbled to the surface as I wrote this piece was the one of intended audience. Beyond my own wish to write for myself and answer my own questions, just whom was I writing this for? Though it should have been obvious from the start, it wasn’t, but the more I wrote and polished the more I realized that I had three sets of imagined readers. One was anybody coming to the piece with no knowledge of Madrona, but an interest in the sixties, civil rights, housing, desegregation, and race. The second similarly consisted of anybody with little or no knowledge of Madrona, but an interest in the way I used mapping and data to link memoir with geography. The third, and most important contingent consisted of people familiar with Madrona. This latter had several nested subsets, each of increasing importance in moving towards the bull’s-eye at the center. From broadest to narrowest: residents of the Central Area in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s; kids who grew up in the Central Area during those decades; kids who went to Madrona in the 1960s; and most crucial of all: my neighborhood friends and Madrona School classmates. I wanted to write something that made total sense to people that were never there, but more importantly, something that would resonate as genuine and fair with those who were.
This last subset, however, required a great deal of discretion if the narrative was not going to be a bland whitewash. Especially in the matter of naming conventions. I use the real names of neighborhood people or classmates only when all the things are positive; the rest have surrogate names. Other potentially identifying information, including physical descriptions and addresses, are purposely left a little vague. Still, friends will recognize themselves, and other friends might make reasonable guesses, but other readers will remain in the dark. Similarly, I never identify the problematic families with criminal penchant by name, but only by a broad street location. As for adult neighbors, I use real names where documentation exists, surrogate names or no names where what is said is not positive, and in only one instance do I use a real name where what is said is not positive. That exception is Mrs. Wright—and her name is left because it speaks to her Northwest Industrialist pedigree. With this smallest but most crucial audience in mind, I also employ place names and words as we used them: Cherry, not East Cherry; Union, not East Union; Empire, not Empire Way; Central Area, not Central District; and above all, Black, not Negro. The last choice is extremely deliberate, and I use it capitalized throughout, both as a term of pride and identity, and to distinguish it from a sloppier pseudo-identification by color. I capitalize White as well, not for a similar connotation of pride, or even grammatical parity, but to highlight its use as a signifier for something other than color; and really, if I was delineating color alone, I would have to describe myself as more pink than white.

Why me?

A simple enough question, but I am not sure authors always trouble to ask. Why should I write this book? Lots of people grew up in the sixties, and more than a few in neighborhoods undergoing dynamic racial shifts. My first clue that I should perhaps write something along these lines came when I was an older, adult student in a Speech 101 class at the University of Hawaii. After the graduate student teaching the class showed us Martin Luther King’s famous “I Had a Dream” speech, one of the many eighteen-year-olds in the class raised his hand and sheepishly said, “I ... I thought we weren’t supposed to use the word ... Negro...” The other students clearly felt the same discomfort. Of course, as the only forty-something in the class, the use made sense to me. As I was required to give a five-minute informative speech before the quarter was over, and this might prove uniquely helpful to them, I decided to speak on that topic. For my required visual aids, I used a picture of my second-grade class, where so many of the boys had clean-shaven heads, and one of the eighth-grade boys basketball team at Meany, with Afros crowding out the top
and side of the photo. I put the photos and my speech in the context of a shift from the use of the term “Negro” to the term “Black.”

Some fifteen years later, I gave an impromptu presentation to a history class on the same topic, drawing on my own experience, which, as I was coming to realize, was not as common as I had thought for most of my life. At the very same time, I was working with a data and geographic specialist on another project, and in the middle of that presentation I started to think about the physical shape of my neighborhood, and how that might have influenced my experience. I drew a pitiful sketch on the board, but suddenly realized that I had essentially lived on a plateau, and this had been huge in influencing my choice of friends over the years. So was born an attempt, not just to delineate my experiences in a more-or-less standard memoir format, but to inform that narrative first by pushing my memory out of its normal channels through various efforts at mapping, quantification, external reading, and long periods spent with my eyes closed, trying to picture anything and everything from that past.

My first map was a friend map—and started a chronological series of friend maps. These dot maps had one dot per friend, color-coded for race, and plotted according to the location of their house. The series started in 1966, and not surprisingly, the few White friends were mostly on 36th and somewhat distant, while the heavier concentration of Black friends was right behind my house. But it was this first visualization that made me realize that the more distant friends had required parental mediation, and raised the totally new question for me: what role did my parents have in some of my early friendships? The answer did not turn on something as simple as race. They were not just friends and associates of the White kids whose parents were doctors and professors on 36th, but also friends with some of the parents of my Black friends sprinkled throughout the neighborhood. When viewed as a unified progression, the separate maps created what I jokingly call the incredible shrinking friend map. By 1969, most of the White friends east of 35th had dropped off the map, and after 1972, all the Black friends west of 34th had done so as well. And it was not until I made this chronological series that I discovered how in one particular year (1973) all but one of my remaining neighborhood friends were mixed-race. Glaringly obvious when I saw it, but as I had never noticed it before, clearly not so obvious as when relying on the well-worn ruts of episodic memory.

Making the friend map, too, forced a series of choices. The first such decision was to set the parameters for what counted as a friend. There had to be more to it than just playing with someone. I finally made my choice: a friend was someone I not only played with, but whose house I went to, and who came to my house. This was my declared, working definition for the duration of the project, but one evening as I was closing my eyes and
picturing activities closely, I noticed something else that I had never noticed before: my friends had a free run of my house, and I had a pretty free run in the houses of some of my friends, but at some friends’ houses I never made it out of the living room. When out of curiosity I mapped this, it turned out to be more likely related to location and economic level rather than to so-called race: 35th Avenue and east, free run of most of the house; 34th and west, with two exceptions, the living room. This did not make us less friends, but certainly suggests a parental guardedness I had not consciously noted at the time.

The difficulty of defining race for the friendship maps was problematic and highlighted yet again how flawed a concept race is (as if this needed confirmation!): how was I to count my very, very light-skinned friends, whose parents were Black, but had one White grandmother, and who seemed to be treated as less than Black by many of the Black kids even though they could use the fro-pic with the best of them? I finally counted them as mixed, arbitrarily, to be sure, but in my mind that’s how I always saw them, and I think that’s how others saw them, too, except perhaps potential employers, which just goes to show how essentially social these determinations are.

My next series of maps—this time, begun with the creation of a spreadsheet—were my violence maps. Including year, location, type of location, type of violence, I had to really comb through my memory again and again, trying to capture as many incidents as I could.
As with the friendship map, decisions had to be made about how to class the types of violence: was a shakedown for a quarter different than a burglary or a stolen bike? Was watching someone else get beat up in the same category as getting beat up myself? Was it appropriate to count merely verbal harassment? Regardless of such slicing and dicing by type, this series when viewed as a whole showed rapid growth, with a notable spike and peak in 1970 and 1971, easily viewable chronologically when I entered the spreadsheet data into an information visualization tool. This confirmed the general picture of what I remembered, although if asked before making the map I probably would have offered up 1968 as the most violent year—but it was not even close. The most interesting surprise—and something I had never thought about before—was the type of place where most violence occurred. It was not on playgrounds or beaches or buses or schools—it was mostly on sidewalks. I had never before acknowledged sidewalks as an inherently dangerous no-man’s land, and again, if asked where I felt most vulnerable, I probably would have said a playground—and would have been wrong.

In the case of my perceived experience of rising violence, external sources certainly confirmed that my perception was not unique or inaccurate. Interestingly, the more I engaged with external sources—ranging from personal accounts to School District reports—the more I began to wonder about the story I had always told myself to explain that rising violence. I always saw it as connected to the shift in tone from the earlier civil rights movement with its predilection for civil disobedience to the more militant stance of Black Power, which advocated violence if necessary, and leaned heavily on rhetoric that included Whitey, Honkey, and Paddy, terms I certainly heard more than I would have liked. I had always told myself that this shift gave any violence against White kids—including the “gimme a quarter” routine—a justification and even impetus that had been lacking before. And though my narrative explanation of long habit doubtless had some kernel of truth and was one that I used to help me explain to myself the rupture with my Black friends on 34th by the end of seventh grade, the more I explored external sources, the more nuanced—and honestly, the more bleak—the picture became for me. One such source was a long essay written by Carol Richman, a social activist in Madrona who had promoted a pre-school enrichment program and a variety of other initiatives to try and level the socio-economic playing field.123 Her oldest two children attended Meany in 1963, in sev-

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enth and ninth grades, and even then—nearly ten years before I had started there—the students had self-separated, Black with Black, and White with White.\textsuperscript{124} Though Richman’s children and other parents and their children—White and Black—tried to counter this by creating an extracurricular interracial activity group—the fact that they felt compelled to create such a group diminished my wistful thought that such separation had only happened in my case because of the politics of the late 1960s. I could not even pin such separation on the empowerment that comes from a great racial imbalance, for Meany in 1963 was approximately fifty percent Black.\textsuperscript{125} The Richman account cast considerable doubt on my fond, long-held idyll of racial harmony for the Madrona generation of youth that immediately preceded mine. Some other documents, however, did provide grounds for a relocation of that idyll: the parents of the Madrona PTA. Thanks to a scrapbook of Madrona PTA miscellany from the late 1950s to the early 1960s held at the Seattle Public Library, one can see evidence supporting such an idyll, where the names of my parents’ friends unfold on handwritten meeting minutes like magical charms to invoke the past: Lee and Virginia Rowell, Joe and Margaret Bland, Jeri Ware, Aki Kurose, Roger Sale, Nan and Al Petit, Marilyn Bierman, Al Larkins, Diana Bower, Carla Chotzen, Carol Richman, Eugene Scruggs, Ben Woo; and a number of names I don’t recognize, but which give a sense of the breadth: Milton Karr, Mrs. George Tokuda, Mrs. Sam Kawakami, Mrs. George Yanagimachi. I even mapped where PTA members of 1961 lived (using Seattle Phone Directories) and found they lived on all four points of the compass from Madrona—but interestingly, not typically too far from the school, and rarely in the more hard-scrabble areas. The racial and ethnic variety was woven on a web of relative economic parity.

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I created another series of maps, using the streets laid out on the 1970 Census Map as a template.\textsuperscript{126} The first of these was an affective map that I informally called the “how did this area make me feel” map.\textsuperscript{127} Picking the year when my neighborhood was at its largest

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\textsuperscript{124}. Carol Richman, “Madrona in the 60s and Early 70s: A Different Time and Place,” section titled, “Meany Association for Interracial Activities, MAIA, 1963–64,” University of Washington Special Collections, Madrona History Project.

\textsuperscript{125}. Hanawalt, The History of Desegregation, 17.


physical extent, I used only two colors, green and purple: the darker the green the safer and happier the space, the darker the purple the more dangerous and unhappy the space. When completed, I discovered two long dark purple lines, Cherry and Union, running all the way from 33rd to Providence Hospital on Cherry, and all the way from 35th to 19th on Union. These were also the most obvious streets in and out of the neighborhood to the west. 34th Avenue beyond Union and its curve into Madrona Drive were by comparison a much lighter shade of light purple, but purple nonetheless. Madrona playfield ended up as a light green space with purple cross-hatching—a Jekyll and Hyde space if ever there was one. While the area by my house had some green, it sported purple hatch-marks as well. Unadulterated green ranged broadly to the east over the ridge, with a little purple cross-hatching at Madrona Beach. Though in 1970, I no longer had friends on the lake-ward slope, I often roamed its quiet, labyrinthine streets with its many trees and sparse population in perfect calm and ease.

Using the same Census Bureau template, I drew a mobility map, intended to show safe routes and perilous routes. The results at first provided a challenge to my understanding. Though the perilous routes in red matched up intelligibly with the purple lines of my “how did this area make me feel” map, and the safe routes predictably adhered to green shading, the routes into peril were extremely limited. After much puzzling, I finally realized the confusion came from a failure to note what was not there. In looking again at my violence maps, and noting the high incidence precisely along these routes, I became consciously aware of something that I had taken for granted because it was so obvious from experience: I had not marked anything but Cherry and Union as routes west of 34th. But if these two main streets were so fraught with peril, why did I insist on using them? Why didn’t I go down side streets? Why was west of 34th on my mobility map just a big blank space with a north-south red line on 34th and two east-west red lines on Cherry and Union? Why did I rarely, if ever, go down the multitude of other streets? Thinking long and hard about it, I realized that though the arterials were perilous, at least there were other people passing to and fro, and that actually made it potentially safer—that is, strangers could intervene if something got out of hand—just as had happened on my brother’s birthday when the women came out on her porch and yelled, or when I was slapped on the swing in the first grade and the boxing champion’s son had come to my

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defense. The fact is the rest of the streets were an unknown and extremely threatening desert to me.

Another discovery I made working with my maps was the fact that I had a strange orientation issue that I didn’t notice until someone else looked at them and couldn’t tell which way was up. I had made all my homemade maps in landscape view, which is natural enough, but with south at the left and north at the right. The cliff and my house stood at the far-left border. Both the starting point and the orientation, instinctively chosen without thought, were an unwitting reflection of my view of the neighborhood: a narrow strip of territory that ran south to north, left to right, like text, starting with an abyss one hundred and fifty feet from my house. It seemed that before I even put a pencil to paper, my internal map of the neighborhood had long been established. Even now if I flip the map and put conventional north at the top, it is dizzying and almost unintelligible, with Madrona School oddly transported towards Garfield High, and my house dropped to the bottom of the page like a footnote.

On another map laid out on the same template, I recalibrated the racial distribution for my neighborhood as presented in the 1970 Census Bureau block statistics. As with my other maps, it is no thing of beauty to look at, but still allowed me a more granular view than that offered by the unmassaged block statistics, with their counting of island blocks rather than street segments and odd pooling of several blocks together into one. Supplementing the extant data with personal recollection gave me a granular snapshot more consistent with the neighborhood as I knew it.

Yet one of the clearest challenges was for me to see the neighborhood as it had been before I lived there and before I knew it. Children tend to see what is in front of them, and not thinking that it could ever have been much different, I had tacitly assumed that the Central Area had always been mostly Black, and that many of the problems people were trying to address were of incredibly long standing. A clear picture of relevant demographic change emerged from a number of reports of the era—notably from geographers and sociologists128, the Urban League, United Good Neighbors, and the Seattle School District.

Drawing on longitudinal statistics that tracked the distribution of minority populations both in the city and in the public schools from 1940 to 1970, the reports portrayed a residential shift of amazing rapidity. I do remember that when I was nineteen, an old Black woman near 17th and Madison had invited me in for hot corn mush on a freezing New Year’s dawn, and while she wiped the corn meal dribbling off her incapacitated husband’s chin, she talked about how their street had been all White, then the Blacks had moved in, and now the Whites were coming back—and though I believed her, I had not grasped the scale or speed of it all, or the scope of the social issues it had intensified. She was certainly right, too, about the Whites moving back in, and my experience is only a part of a larger and continuing saga of neighborhood transition. Anyone wanting to know what happened over the next three decades should read Doug Merlino’s, *The Hustle: Ten Lives in Black and White*, which describes Central Area neighborhood change during and after the 1980s.

School District reports even provided me the added bonus of discussing statistics and initiatives that pertained to years when I was in the school system. Such information nudged both my memory and understanding. One magnum opus described the entire Middle School Program in detail129, and provided context for what I clearly remembered about self-paced learning, team teaching, time management, and legally thwarted bussing plans. Another hefty report by former Garfield High Principal Frank Hanawalt provided similar insight into various desegregation efforts starting in the early 1960s. Another School District report exhaustively studied transfers out of the public schools, again confirming my own perception that a lot of people—and not just White ones—were doing so.130 The report also pointed out that Garfield had been very lenient about letting students transfer to other public high schools. This was another source of depletion that

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did not just increase its overall Black population, but insidiously weakened it by giving exit passes to its potentially most motivated students.

Published narratives also proved to be good prompts for contextualization and for remembering what the shapes of some of my friends’ lives looked like. Aaron Dixon’s *My People are Rising*, Stephanie Oliver Stokes’ *Song for my Father*, Peter Bacho’s *Dark Blue Suits*, Horace Cayton’s *Long Old Road*, and Clifford Hooper’s *The Neighborhood* all helped me grasp the larger picture. I saw and recognized a lot of what I remembered, but I also saw what I had not necessarily remembered well. Hooper’s book is without doubt the most strident but, in doing so, is perhaps the only one that gives full voice to a bitterness and disappointment found by those who came to Seattle and discovered it to be not so very different from the south. A fascinating refrain that appears in all the books—including Hooper’s—is the healing role played by the lake, mountain scenery, and green boulevards, and though the Olmsted Brothers’ work did serve to increase the property values of some individuals, the social intent to provide a means of refreshment to all citizens appears to have been borne out to some degree.

I also deliberately sought out secondary academic sources written in the 1960s and 1970s in the hope that the framing language and even some of the concepts would elicit the arcane byways of my memory. This was less successful than I had hoped—in the mélange of characterizations about Negro this, and Negro that, and choking at every use of the word “ghetto”—I found myself rarely able to read all the way through. The only activation of my memory was indirect—not by eliciting any specific memories but rather by inciting a bilious, deep-seated, and strongly felt resistance. Trying to read these, my own inner Clifford Hooper rose irrepressibly up: Who are these people? What do they know? And just where do they get off? If I can read this—my own book—ten years from now and not set off my inner Clifford Hooper, I will count it quite an accomplishment.

One of the most pleasant surprises, though, in looking for sources of the 1960s and 1970s—and none of which set off my inner Clifford Hooper—were several that explored mapping, specifically in Black neighborhoods, and in some cases, specifically focusing on children. Margaret Tindal’s *The Home Range of Black Elementary School Children* provided


ways to think about mapping my own childhood neighborhood experiences in a very relevant context. Even more interestingly, largely because of its direct creation by community members, is the 1971 publication, *The Geography of the Children of Detroit*. The perspectives of these community members—whether mapping money flows, voting districts, locations where children were killed by commuter cars, the spread of a riot, or sympathizing with White children trapped in a vestigial pocket of Appalachians—on account of their language and modes of expression—rang more true to my experience than any other single source. For instance, the editor objected as follows to the sponsors’ report on their work to the Council of American Geographers:

We do not like being referred to as a “ghetto resident.” It is patronizing, the “slogan of the day.” It is almost like comic relief. You expect to see some “ghetto resident” pop up from some place—raggedy, ignorant, fumbling, drooling at the mouth, this poor underprivileged kid, when it is not necessarily so. We have proved that these “ghetto residents” can take college credit courses and do community research and they do not fit at all the definition of a “ghetto resident” as used in this country. They are the Black people of Detroit. I think everyone would prefer to be known as that, just who they are, the Black people of Detroit, without any social connotations to it at all.133

The community geographers emphasized the need to get the feel of an area, and to drill down below what might show up on most maps. In one case, they pointed out that the Census Bureau Data used to inform a school decentralization plan had counted Black and White populations, but had not made any notation of the fact that part of the Black population was inhabited by Black lawyers and doctors, whereas across “12th street” there was no middle-class population.134

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In these reports, I can hear the gift for language of my friends as I grew up, as in the following:

And we used to have mice, little bitty mice. I was really freaked out by the little animals but they did not bother me that much. I could still sleep and eat and come into the house. It happened about six months later. These mice matured into rats. I guess the rats just ate off the mice. It all just changed overnight in the whole neighborhood. The whole place was infested. And these were not those little rats, the kind you see in encyclopedias. Water rats: eight inch bodies and eleven inch tails; those were the kind of monkeys living over there.¹³⁵

This is straightforward, vivid language, full of voice. It does not need slang or rats to make it sing, and so it was with my childhood friends. In movies and other portrayals, the slang and the rats often win out because they are such obvious markers for outsider gawkers craving an ounce of ghetto chic, but in doing so the slang and rats often drown out the real beauty of the delivery. I probably don’t need to add that my inner Cliff Hooper would like to seek out the screenwriter who created the chauffeur in Die-Hard so I could beat him over the head hard with either Jar-Jar Binks or Dobbins, both of which are hideous subaltern reprisals.

Though there is a large literature on affective mapping—making maps that show how you feel—and cognitive mapping—making maps that show your own “picture” of a neighborhood—and narrative mapping—making maps to tell stories—one image out of all the thousands and thousands of words on mapping struck me most strongly while working on this book. This was the image of the crumpled handkerchief. It helped me out of the trap of maps that were originally wedded to topography, measured distance, and the cultural artifacts and developments grafted onto them. I had no coherent means to visualize affinities across disparate parts of the map or seemingly anomalous irruptions within a single part. An example of affinities across would be my parents’ circle of friends and fellow activists, only one of which lived within a block. An example of irruptions within would be our household intruders, who, although they lived barely a block away, could not have been more distant, economically or socially, if they had lived on Venus. Visitors could be invited across, and vice versa, the mutual assent of social affinity in essence

creating a regular circle on an ironed handkerchief, which, folded in two, neatly abrogated physical distance. But imagine another circle, this one comprised of wild social distances, and minus any assent whatsoever. Crumple it up, and physical distance loses its strength and predictability, and the farthest points socially might be easily superimposed. Propinquity, as it turns out, only goes so far in explaining social relations. The child behind the white picket fence with the well-tended flowers was miles away from the plethora of kids in the weed and dirt yard two inches away; and every time he escaped to play with the rest of us the handkerchief was crumpled, no doubt to the chagrin of his very earnest and well-meaning parents. Even after our housebreakers had retreated, whether to their own house or elsewhere, their brazen crumpling of the handkerchief left permanent marks on our thoughts and even our behavior. Until I ran across this image—courtesy of a 1995 conversation of Michael Serres with Bruno Latour—my maps, though accurate depictions, made little affordance for the porosity of extremely divergent social dynamics.\(^{136}\)

Another set of resources I drew upon, though never mentioned in the text, were two classroom artifacts, one from second grade, and another from fifth. The second grade class artifact confirmed what I remembered about the class—that we all knew each other well and had a great time together. It was a crayon-illustrated and mimeographed booklet in which we each finished a sentence about why the mail must go through. Many of us mentioned each other in our sentences, as well as Squirt—who I am guessing was our pet of the month. The fifth-grade artifact was from a program that had been rolled out at Madrona to develop students’ creative writing skills. Spearheaded by Kate Bullitt,\(^{137}\) one of the city’s most wealthy, progressive leaders, and whose own children were then enrolled at Meany Junior High, the program drew students from all Madrona fifth-grade classes.\(^{138}\) I was in the drama group with some of my best pals from earlier grades and we had a great time, especially during the acting exercises. The drama group was led by Mary


Jenson, the sister of Betty McDonald, who had written *The Egg and I*; both sisters had lived in the Madrona of a much earlier era. The program issued our work in a booklet titled *Trial Balloons* and it is almost miraculous how, in one case at least, I can hear one friend’s sense of humor and his ability to mimic:

*Ring, ring.*

*Then a southern voice said:* ‘Ha hunny chald, can you come ova tunat?’

‘Sorry dear, but I’m doing some work tonight, and I have to go to a all Black student lecture to hear some student speak about the law.’

‘Sorry to botha you so. Ba ba.’

In parts of the booklet, you can see the whole world around us going into us and coming back out again, with references to smoking “Norwegian Wood,” and “the pigs,” and an improvised argument where siblings battle over the bathroom and the brother tells the girl to get the naps out of her head. There is plenty of commonality across the work—arguments, excitement, cops and robbers—but one difference that stands out is the mention of places. Mount Baker, Lake Chelan, Holland, New York, and China only figure prominently in the writing of the White kids. Clear evidence, whether we knew it yet or not, that perceptibly divergent frames of reference were already in play.

Another artifact that gives an idea of what was on my mind I found thrown in with a bunch of photos and other bric-a-brac from childhood. It was a short story, and so far as I can tell from my Dad’s obsolete memo paper that I typed it on, I wrote it around the fourth grade. It was one of many stories that included a group of raccoons whose leader was named Lofer. Except for the dozens of strikeovers, I have reproduced it below as closely as I can:

*The Trouble with the OPARATER.*

Part I: *THE find out.*

Well it was a regular day and allwas well.

At least that morning. They went down to the

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139. *Creative Writing and Playwriting Classes, Fifth Grade, under the Volunteer Instruction Program at Madrona Elementary School, Trial Balloons* (Seattle, 1970), in author’s possession.
Lake. They saw many animals. Even a deer. Just a regular day, said Lofer. Even if it is a regular day its alright with me. What we need is a break from everything. Today we will just be lazy, O.K. Yes they all said. When they were lazing off. Something was happening. The OPERATER was at work. At their house. The oparater does bad work. He never lets his calls be privet. He just listins in on the other animals calls. When they got home they were about to call a freind when they saw a few footprints. They knew somebody came in while they were gone. They tried to figure out who its was. They though Thought and thought. They just could not find ou Out who it was.\textsuperscript{140}

Though at the time I thought my parents were being paranoid, it has long since been revealed that the FBI had a huge COINTELPRO surveillance and disruption program aimed specifically at the Black Panthers, and I am more willing to give them the benefit of the doubt now about our line being tapped.\textsuperscript{141} The unknown strangers leaving footsteps in a house strikes another note of insecurity, but seems to owe less to the FBI than to the burglars having left their mark on me. Beyond any content, the artifact is in itself a good reminder. The terrible typing and worse spelling reveal just how young my mind was when all these things were happening. Such visual evidence is a good corrective for anybody writing about his or her own childhood, for it is far too easy to project a more sophisticated you onto an earlier you, which is a peril almost as great as disguising the earlier you with a perfected, self-mythologized you. In remembering accurately, we can barely get out of our own way, and even then cannot be certain that we have. For instance, I remember my prime imperative as being play—but my Mom’s friend, Lillian, remembered a different me: someone who holed up in his room and read books all the time. That is not exactly the me that I remember. But who is to say?


\textsuperscript{141} Franziska Meister, \textit{Racism and Resistance: How the Black Panthers Challenged White Supremacy}, (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2017), 95–121.
Archival material was also pivotal in helping me nudge my memory and enhance my understanding. Naturally, I found a lot of confirmation of what I thought I remembered, but there were surprises as well. For instance, I thought my Dad was pretty through with the Panthers after picking up the abandoned car in Gorman, but his address to an audience at Princeton, only three months later, provided a corrective to my apparently incomplete view. The early minority scholarship effort he was part of at the UW was also a surprise. Several huge surprises lay waiting for me in the Madrona-Denny-Blaine Community Club materials. I was totally surprised to find the blatantly racist by-laws and newsletter content of the 1930s. (The by-law requirement to be Caucasian, by the way, was challenged and even defended as late as the 1950s, its president defending it along with the necessary legality of abiding by racially restrictive clauses in property deeds.) I was more strangely surprised in the newsletter by the frequent editorial railing against government spending and government regulation, even as the members petitioned the City of Seattle for this or that improvement. I had forgotten that Reagan had only reprised the anti-New-Deal rhetoric, yet was still surprised to find such spoutings so close at hand. To paraphrase Jesus, I suppose the rich will be with us always.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of all was stumbling across the original owner and architect of the house on 425 35th Avenue and learning that I could view the plans for the addition in the archives. It was an entirely lucky shot. I was up at 4 a.m. looking at a generic book on Seattle houses and architecture, and in one of the indexes spotted my address. I had to look three times to be sure, since it was four a.m., and even rubbed my eyes as someone might in a movie, but there it was. It listed the architect and the owner. It was surprising in part because the house was so modest in comparison to the other houses on the block. More sleuthing, online and in catalogs, eventually brought me to know exactly how wealthy and New-Englandy the owner had been, and helped me discover that I could view the plans for the addition at the University of Washington. Though mundane to learn that the floors were required to get three coats of stain, it was both eerie and funny to learn that I had grown up in a maid’s room.

142. Pieroth, *Desegregating the Public Schools*, 21–23.
Last, but certainly not least, was a steady movement inward. Gathering all this information was one thing, but processing it was another. For instance, after reading any reports describing the neighborhood, I would find the next quiet time, close my eyes, and picture myself in the places mentioned, to see what I could see. What I saw was sometimes the same and sometimes different. And no matter what two of the reports stated, Cherry down to 23rd and 34th near Union, were not nearly as bad as described; and the presence of the Black Panthers headquarters did not precipitate the demise of the 34th and Union. However, such reports did help me see more clearly the difference between the labyrinthine streets east of 35th and the waffle-grid ones west of it, and offered data that supported what I had noticed about the living conditions of some of my friends. Even the unfamiliar language of collector streets and arterials in one city report helped me picture how my friends and I moved around. Again, until I closed my eyes and pictured our activities closely, I had never noticed before that only once or twice did I go anywhere in the cars of friends’ parents who lived west of 35th.

Most of all, I made a point of taking large segments of time to picture and remember things—anything, it didn’t really matter what—in as close detail as I might. Some of this I did just before going to sleep at night. Most of what I remembered never made direct mention in the narrative—not the revolving clothes hanger in the neighbors’ yard, not the 1930s floral wallpaper on our stairwell, not the smell of the third story dormers in the house next door, not the quarters lying in the thick ooze of Mrs. Chin’s blood on the sidewalk after she was robbed, or the way box hedge smelled like pee when it rained, or the drip-drip of our gutters in the standpipes. Yet not knowing in advance what was or was not relevant to this narrative, it was important to sink into it all as deeply as possible, picturing it from all the old angles and adding any new ones. At the same time, I had to be on guard to minimize the distortion and refraction caused by the multiple layers of paint laid on during all intervening time. For this reason, it is probably extremely helpful that I stopped living in Madrona in 1980. At the tail end of researching this narrative, I did visit the neighborhood, and spent a day walking around, and though I could picture the past, I was hard pressed to see it through the present. The one place I clearly saw this world recreated was in a book of sketches by the architect Victor Steinbreuck that was published in the early 1960s. More than any photographs, his sketches captured the moment, and I rarely had to look at the captions to know where I was. He even captured the stretch of Madrona Beach where I took swimming lessons in the rain in 1966.

Ironically, of course, in trying to get to the past like this one is always scratching after something that has long been gone and probably never quite existed, anyway. But if others in reading this have arrived at something even remotely like it, it has been worth the effort. And if others are inspired to explore their own experiences more fully, I will be even more pleased. For I have always been convinced that Rilke was wrong by only one word. You must not change your life, you must save it.


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