

Memories of West Lane Place

By: Ann Hastings

In June of 1998 I have lived in West Lane Place for 50 years. My parents, Marguerite and Frank Byrnes purchased our home at #9 Lana Lane in June, 1948 for \$9,500. The builder made them choose between a fire place and a screened-in porch. In 1956 my husband Louise Eugene Hastings and I, Ann Byrnes Hastings, purchased the house from my parents for \$11,500.

I have seen many changes over the years. When my folks first moved here, our family and relatives would complain that they had to pack a lunch when they came to visit because we lived "half way to San Antonio"! Now we are inside the loop with the city spread out all around us. In 1948 we were not even within the city limits.

The street names are fairly standard. Lana was the name of Jess Little's daughter. Hackberry is a common tree in the area. Bash is a mystery.

I was eleven years old when we moved to WLP. My dad worked for the builder, Jess Little, as his comptroller. When we moved in, the north part of the subdivision (West Lane Street and Mid Lane to West Alabama) was nearing completion. Lana Lane was just getting started. We were the second house on the street. The first house built on Lana Lane was #11, bought by Jane and Beek Besecker. When we moved in we had open drainage ditches and the streets were shell with an overcoating of oil.

In about 1951 WLP was annexed by the city of Houston. Richmond Avenue ended at the railroad tracks. Greenacres Horse Farm was where Afton Oaks is now. We loved to watch the horses and riders, and if we were lucky we could help exercise the horses. The back part of what is now Afton Oaks was a thick growth of lovely big old oak trees and a great place for the neighborhood kids to wander, dream, and play.

All curbs and gutters were paid for by the residents. We had to pay so much a linear foot for installation. For months we drove in mud to get to our houses while these were being installed.

The city bus stopped at Lamar High School until 1952. My mother and father had only one car and my mother would put her bicycle in the trunk of the car, drive to Lamar, leave the car for my dad and ride her bike home. When Dad got to the end of the bus line the car would be waiting for him. I could have ridden the school bus but chose to ride from Lanier Junior High to Lamar and walk the rest of the way. (I did not like the teasing I got on the school bus.)

Where did we shop when we moved to this far suburb? My mother drove to a Weingarten's Grocery on Westheimer and Hazard. We were all so excited when Henke and Pilot built a store in the Highland Village area.

When we moved to WLP our elementary school was T.H. Rogers, located on the south west corner of Westheimer and Post Oak Lane. After one day at the elementary school I refused to return. You see, the toilets were outhouses instead of regular inside rest rooms. My mother then drove me to Woodrow Wilson Elementary on Fairview.

In 1948 the Galleria area looked very different. On the southeast corner was a two-story white building owned by Mr. Voss. It housed a grocery store with a pool hall in the back. The other two corners were just open fields. The northeast corner became Weingarten's Grocery (now the Container Store). Later a drive-in/icehouse opened on Westheimer just west of the railroad tracks and we could buy milk and bread there. A year or so later a small fabric and notions shop opened next to the drive-in.

When we moved to WLP in 1948 the area was devoid of trees except for some native persimmons. All the trees you see today were planted by the first home owners. My mother would dig up trees from her parents' farm in Montgomery County and plant them in our yard. There were lots of spider lilies growing wild. Part of WLP had been a rice farm. We think there was once a dump in WLP.

WLP had its own sanitary sewer treatment plant located on Bash Street. I remember it being surrounded by wild persimmon trees and spider lilies. This was a great place to run and play and have the freedom not known to city children today. We kids used the new construction like other children used the city playgrounds, hide and seek, in and out of the houses. The framing of new houses was used like jungle gyms and was great for make-believe games.

One of the last spots to be built was the southeast corner of Mid Lane and West Alabama. In fact, we all believed it would be left as a park area for the neighborhood. This is where we played baseball and kick the can and where we gathered as teenagers. I remember everybody bringing blankets and radios and listening to the Houston Buffs' games in the summer evenings.

My mother and dad belonged to a neighborhood square dance club. They danced outside on the driveways of two-car garages. There were weekly barbecues where neighbors would bring their own meat and cook at one another's houses.

During the Pin Oaks Horse Show, we were serenaded by the band that played for the show. The sound carried beautifully to our backyards and we would take advantage of it by having cookouts. The horse show took place in the area now occupied by the Home Depot.

Few people had fenced back yards on Lana Lane until the early 1960's. As a teenager we had the run of many backyards. There were four yards where we lived on the curve of Lana Lane which made for one great play area for my sister and me, and later for my three children. Prior to the hurricane of 1964 there was a wonderful fort built by two families where children spent many nights and the telling of "bloody bones" stories scared the faint-of-heart back to the safety of their own beds.

Our drainage ditch was put in around 1955 and we have not had any serious flooding since then. When curbs and gutters were put in the streets were lowered two or three feet to facilitate drainage. We have not had any major flooding since that time.

The residents of WLP have been very civic-minded. We have worked long and hard to improve neighborhood schools and to maintain the neighborhood's quality of life. We paid for and installed curbs, gutters and street lights; we renewed deed restrictions; we fought federal government when they wanted to install a railroad overpass on Richmond Road.

We left the neighborhood to move closer to our children in Montgomery. I think we leave it better than we found it.