

**Longevity in North Avondale**-An ongoing project to record our history from those who have lived in the neighborhood the longest! Please reach out to me, Jolene Struebbe, [jmstruebbe@gmail.com](mailto:jmstruebbe@gmail.com) if you would like to tell your family story.

This month, as I kick off this project, I am so excited to introduce two “longevity” families and share their stories of living in North Avondale. You will learn more about **Ernest Fontana and Nelida Mietta-Fontana at 3950 Ledgewood and Bob and Mary Wells at 4245 Rose Hill.**



**Ernest Fontana and his wife, Nelida Mietta-Fontana**, met in graduate school at the University of Notre Dame. They moved to Cincinnati in 1966 and lived for a brief while in Swifton Village. In **August 1968** they rented at the Park Lane on Victory Parkway and began their tenure in North Avondale. They then moved to their current location at 3950 Ledgewood (which was built in 1925) in August 1970, where they rented from their friend, Richard Meister, until they bought the house from him in May 1971. They paid \$19,500 for the house and recall having an 8 ½ % interest rate!

Ernest and Nelida were both involved in education. Ernest was a professor at XU and ultimately became the chair of the English Department at Xavier. Nelida was a public-school teacher and ultimately a principal. North Avondale was attractive for many reasons for the young couple, but initially because it allowed Ernest to walk to work and they could get by with one car. They describe their home as a middle-class house, yet a serious upgrade, almost “Baronial” Ernest says, compared to homes they lived in as children – Ernest in Little Italy in Cleveland and Nelida in Argentina. And, to this day, they love that North Avondale is close to downtown and the hospitals, is aesthetically pleasing and has “housing that cannot be duplicated”! As an aside, they mention that North Avondale is especially good for older people as recently it only took them 6 minutes by car to get to the hospital for a medical concern! They love that they have a “nature preserve” in the backyard—deer, birds and more! “It is a paradox to live in the middle of the city and have all of this nature surround us”, Ernest says!

They have two children, a son born while they lived in Park Lane and a daughter who was born on Ledgewood. The children both went to Xavier Lab School, then the North Avondale School and onto Walnut Hills. At this time, the North Avondale school was a neighborhood school and the children knew and played with children all across North Avondale. (Once the school became a magnet school it lessened these contacts.) They recall that there were many black and white children, as well as Catholic and Jews on the street, that all went to school together. Their son, who now teaches Black and Hispanic children in the Chicago area, feels that his experience at North Avondale School and in

the neighborhood set the foundation for him to be successful with the diversity in his classroom today. Nelida says they had “a great childhood”, sometimes outside all day playing, only coming in for lunch.

Their careers kept them busy, but they still found time to attend monthly NANA meetings. Today, Nelida remains active in the neighborhood book club.

Over the years they say North Avondale has become more upscale. It is not as integrated. They recall Jewish families, however, leading the campaign to avoid “white flight”. Today they say the neighborhood is still mixed, it just that the “categories” have changed. There are many more LGBTQIA+. It is wonderful that North Avondale continues to be welcoming to all.

Ernest was fortunate to pick up a great book at the Cincinnati Art Museum book sale, published by the Williams Co., titled “Ohioans of Today”. He says half the book is about Cleveland, where he is from and ½ about Cincinnati- North Avondale! I know, that I, for one, am looking forward to taking a look at this book soon!! (PS There is also a graduate thesis published by a graduate student at XU on The History of North Avondale. More information on this when I return to Cincinnati in April and can share details of the author.)

Now, for Bob and Mary Wells ....



**Bob and Mary Wells**, lived in Cleveland where Bob got a Ph.D. at Case Western. They moved to Fairfield in November of 1972 when Bob got a Job with P&G at Miami Valley Labs. Mary has a Masters in Special Education from Columbia and worked in Cleveland, and then subbed in Cincinnati. One day, while watching TV, Mary saw people in North Avondale discussing a project and they leaned very liberal. Mary liked and noticed this. Concurrently, a co worker of Bob’s lived on Beechwood Ave. and invited them to a party. They went “nuts” at the architecture, the spacing of the houses, and the trees!! (As a side note, this “friend”, lived at the current Xavier President’s house and he paid \$20,000 for the house a few years earlier!)

There were plenty of houses for sale when Bob and Mary decided North Avondale was for them. The riots had occurred in South Avondale and houses were very cheap. They loved North Avondale from the get go! Their house has style, large closets, nice yard and a big basement! Bob and Mary closed on their dream house at 4245 Rose Hill Avenue on **July 6, 1973**. They paid \$35,000 for the house.

Over the years, Mary was very involved in North Avondale. She was the editor of NANA News, and was the Treasurer of the Clinton Hills Swim Club. In the 1980's she was part of the "Sanctuary Movement" housing refugees from El Salvador at the Quaker House. She continues to be part of a neighborhood book club.

In the time Mary and Bob have been in North Avondale, they have noticed that the houses have become a lot more expensive and the people have become younger (HA)! When they moved in, they were surrounded by "medical" people. There were lots of psychiatrists then, but fewer today.

Bob notes that the streets of North Avondale used to be paved in wood blocks! He has several that he has collected as the streets have been renovated. He says the wood blocks date back to horse and buggy times. In fact, he can remember being told that in the early 1900's Saturday nights meant carriages lined up on Beechwood Avenue with visitors and guest attending balls in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor ball rooms on these homes. (Sadly, not mine!).

Bob and Mary say they would resist moving from North Avondale. They continue to like it here!!

*Jolene Struebbe*