



Longevity in North Avondale: 3984 Abington

Description

June Hobbs was living in Evanston when she and her husband, Manuel Hobbs, drove down Mitchell Avenue and all the trees were in bloom and she said it was such "beautiful scenery" that she wanted to live nearby. So, in 1962 they moved to 3984 Abington. They chose this home as it was on a "no outlet street" and it had bedrooms on the first floor; June finds she really appreciates this now more than ever! The couple paid \$16,500 and June says she's "been here this long and is very well satisfied". Living here has "been a joy". While June has had offers to buy her home, she says "This is where I'll be when the Lord calls me"!



At that time, North Avondale was mostly a Jewish neighborhood, June recalls, and she mentions that they were the “first black family on this street”. As a child, June had always been exposed to other races and recalls that when she graduated from Walnut Hills High School in 1955 there were only 5 black kids in her graduating class. Once they moved in, however, the “signs started going up”. Some accused their realtor of “block busting”, which meant getting one black family to move in to result in other neighbors putting their houses up for sale. Yet, even though June knew the reason others were selling, it didn’t make her feel bad. “The people who moved in after others sold were great neighbors”. June and her husband both worked for and retired from the Post Office.

Soon after moving in, the family across the street brought their kids over to play and June thought “this

was such a generous offer". June and Manuel raised six children on Abington. Being able to walk to the North Avondale School was a real plus. I had the additional pleasure of speaking with two of June and Manuel's children that grew up in the home: Allison Hobbs Smith (who now lives with mom) and Darwin Hobbs (who was visiting from Atlanta).

Allison recalls having a very diverse group of friends growing up. She says "it was normal to be in a diverse community. The majority of my friends were white". They were able to play outside until the sun went down. And as they had the longest driveway on the street all the kids came to their house to play. On any day they could be playing football, tag or hide n seek, but one day (4/1) they were playing street baseball when a neighbor boy knocked Allison over. Allison was known as a tomboy, yet that day she was not hopping right back up. Everyone thought she was just "April fooling", when in reality she had broken her leg! She had a cast on until 6/26 and missed going to Mammoth cave with her elementary class. Allison has very fond memories of attending North Avondale school and said she still keeps in touch with some of her teachers.

Both Allison and Darwin say that Mitchell, Ardmore, Warwick, and Dickson Streets were "so safe", yet directly across Mitchell was St. Bernard, which "was not diverse and definitely not welcoming to us black kids". They told me that "children of color were told to make their time brief on those streets". One day, they recalled their sister, Pam, riding her bike heading to Boehm's pony key when a white girl ran out in front of her bike and Pam hit the girl. The girl's mom called the police and Pam found herself in the back of a police car at 9 or 10 years old. Dad was called to come get her and when they returned across the street to North Avondale, they felt like they were in "the promised land". Many years later, Allison recalls telling her now 31-year-old daughter, as a child, to "watch herself" in St. Bernard. Luckily Darwin recalls they were "so affirmed in their own personal space, they never had the desire to be part of" these non-welcoming communities. "We have more community over here". While attending Woodward and Withrow High Schools, both Allison and Darwin recalled having a great sense of pride in being able to say they were from NORTH Avondale.

Nowadays the neighborhood seems to be changing and more white families are moving back in. The family talked about needed efforts to engage all of the North Avondale community, not just those in the upper echelon. In fact, Darwin nominated Allison, whom he called "liquid sunshine" to help with these efforts. I for one, will be reaching out to her! Our conversation ended with Darwin being convinced to serenade me with "The Skyline Jingle". It was then, that I learned that I had been talking with Darwin Todd Hobbs, American gospel music singer – but still humbly our neighbor!

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