

Saying Goodbye to the New Haven Years

A few years before Mom died, it became clear that she shouldn't be living alone. So she came to live with Paul and me; and it became mostly my responsibility to empty and sell the New Haven house, the home where she'd made her life and where her five kids had grown up.

Mom had lived at 419 Norton Parkway for over 50 years. In the house's dusty corners and closets, lay the detritus of her full life, and of her five children, who'd long since flown the coop, leaving behind out-dated clothing, antiquated electronics, and old school books which had to be distributed among the kids or sent to the dump. Most of it went to the dump. Only a few boxes of mementos came with Mom to my house, mostly old photo albums, Mom's guitar, and her clothing.

The one item I'd hoped to find was an old reel-to-reel tape of us kids growing up: Jerry making an incredible sticky mess of his first peanut butter and jelly sandwich; me doing the hoochie coochie dance; all of us at the beach, building sand castles and splashing in the water. We never did find that tape.

When the house was completely empty and swept clean, I went to the second floor for one last look out the windows to the back yard. The shadow of a baseball diamond was still barely visible where the grass had never quite recovered from the packed earth of hundreds of baseball games.

All that was left of the swing, where I'd spend so many hours reaching toward the sky, were two rusty bolts embedded by tree growth, as the old sycamore grew rings over the bolts with each passing year, and the chains rusted away.

The sycamore had spread its branches past the edges of both sides of the property, and all the bushes along the edges had grown in toward the center of the yard. The yard which felt like a playground in paradise when we were young, now seemed small and neglected. It had been decades since we'd chased butterflies, cartwheeled across the lawn, and came thundering in for dinner at the sound of the dinner bell.

One last look at the silent living room where the piano had once stood, and where there had been so much music over the years, with Mom playing guitar and singing. The long window seat that had held four or five of us was empty, and the shades that had always been open were pulled shut.

I locked the door for a final time. It had been a home and a yard with a lot going on, a lot of life being lived there, but it was time for another family to make it their own.