

Alice Baker and Annel Pardee

What a title? What an experience! I don't know that my parents had any idea about what their neighbors were like when they moved into their home, but as hindsight would dictate, God blessed our whole family with neighbors we would love for decades.

These two ladies formed a foundation for myself and my sister, and, I think, gave structure to my parents marriage. It seems to me my childhood would not have been complete without these two ladies. And ladies they were! They were not my grandparents and I am not writing this to suggest they replaced my relatives, but they embellished all what a grandparent would, should, and could offer to a child. And they were always there. For me... For us.

When I was very young, I'm not sure I remember as accurately as it was, but, I remember, when I was maybe five years old, a very, very old woman (maybe 60 years old), that washed her hair at the pump outside. I remember Annel doing this. All week long she would keep her hair in some kind of a bun. But once a week, (Saturday maybe) she'd wash her hair at the pump. What a goddess for a young boy!

Here's a lady with a gold peg where a front tooth belongs. She also had wild gray hair reaching her waist. What an incredible experience. I saw my neighbor and... She was a witch! Where was her broomstick?

She was a little boys dream. Mine! Wild hair, missing teeth... what more could a little boy want? As much as a little boys' imagination might run away, I knew her so well that I knew she'd have to be a "good" witch. You know... like "The Wizard of Oz".

As I grew up I used to like to see her. I was still young. We had a fence separating our property. What a waste that was! I think it was there when my parents bought their homes and Dad took care of it just because it was there. It had no place between our families. Aunt used to come to our back fence to see me. I'd see her walking over, and I'd climb the fence to try to get as "face to face" as I could with her. She'd then chastise me for climbing on the fence. I'm as stubborn as a rock, I was! I never climbed on the fence unless I saw Aunt coming to see me. I loved that lady so much. It took my mind to remind me of when I'd climb on that fence. Now I remember. Aunt and I used to sing. I'd play

the piano and, I think, ~~and~~ both howl...
"Jesus Loves Me this I know" or "Jesus Loves the
Little Children" or We sure had fun and
chances are we stunk but we enjoyed ourselves.
I learned to play the cornet and at times I
would drive my family with my practicing,
absolutely crazy. I'd go to, or I'd be asked to
go to the "back forty" which was the pasture,
and continue with my practicing. I should
have been arrested for disturbing the peace, but
sometimes Aunt would help me with a song
she was familiar with.

Aunt was a "people person" and I loved her
throughout my youth. When I came home from
the service in the early seventies Aunt asked
me how the Army was treating me, and, not
a member of that branch of the service I
responded, "The Navy is fine." She continued
to ask me many questions about the army
and I'd tell her about what I was doing in
the navy. Some people would find this
upsetting but I did not. She was in the army
as a nurse and that's what she remembered.
She was now an old woman, undisturbed by
our dialogue, and near her end. The Lord
took her home and I'm looking forward to seeing
her again.

Alice was quite different, as sisters often are. Alice was very organized and methodical in all she did. If only one person can be the "adult" in a household, that was her. Where Aunt would readily play games with my sister and I, it would take coaxing to get Alice to participate. My sister and Alice both enjoyed reading so it was not unusual to find them in the parlor reading or discussing books while Aunt and I were on the go. When the four of us would play games, mainly croquet and canasta, the differences in these two sisters really stood out. When one of us would become "poison" in croquet, Alice would tap the ball out of play. Aunt, on the other hand, would try to "crack" the ball to the neighbors down the street. With canasta, a game requiring more thought than athletic ability, Alice would tend to excel. Even as a young child, I could sense the brilliance this lady held. I'm not sure, but I think "Meet the Press" was her favorite TV show. Certainly, she was that show's biggest fan. In the garden I think Aunt prepared the vegetables where Alice spent more time with the flowers. However, they were both top-notch gardeners in all respects. I remember

more than a few times when Alice would get upset with "that old guack grass" She hired me, .50 an hour, and I worked hard. I could drive the shovel into the ground, where she could not, but Alice could still bend over and pull out the roots. When one might break and she was having a bad day, sometimes she'd "swear". If she was very upset she'd say, "Damn, Damn, Double Damn, Triple Damn, Heck!" Then she'd be embarrassed for having done so. I've been to four continents on this planet, yet this fact remains: Alice made the best donuts in the world.

When these ladies past away my sister and I were offered an "article" of our choice. Anything we wanted to remember them by. My sister chose a rocker she often used when she and Alice would talk and read. I wanted it all. Honestly, not for ~~greedy~~ purpose but because of the memories. There's the house, land, a Russian helmet Paul brought back from WWII, the antiques they used in their day-to-day lives, the outhouse I used more times than I can count, and on and on... I didn't get these things as you know but I found out I didn't need them. I chose a mantle

Look. Something I see everyday, hear everyday,
(except when I forget to wind it) that reminds
me of seeing and hearing it in their dining
room while we would play canasta. The clock
keeps alive within me, the memories of our lives
together.

Well, I only touched on some of the aspects of
your heritage, Alice Baker and Annel Pardee.

To do more would take a book. To do less
would be shameful. To be proud of this
legacy is the least you do. If those outside
your family can feel this way - and many
do - then you can truly feel blessed.

Think of it. Does it get any better than this?

Not in any family I know of. Be proud of

these "roots" because I know I'm honored

to be a part of the history of two fantastic
sisters: Alice Baker and Annel Pardee!

Mark Finney - 1997

Alice Baker Reunion