

New Kid

by lisa rosenblatt

So you were the new kid on the block. At the age of five, you moved into this neighborhood halfway between Boston and Worcester, hanging on to the very edge of Framingham, a town that bursts the borders of the definition of town with a population of roughly 68,000. The newness of the United States as a nation and the newness of your neighborhood, set in balance by the old stone milestone from the post road leading from Boston out to what at the time was the far west of the Bay State Colony, Worcester, whose name, like Framingham, is not from the people living there at the time, but the colonists. There is a Worcester and a Framingham in Old England, too, but not a Massachusetts, that's from this land. That milestone that marks the miles from Boston is randomly embedded in the ground at the first turn off the main road into the "new" development. Right at the milestone off Pleasant Street and you're in Pheasant Hill, two rights, three lefts, and there you are on Wildewood Terrace. Wild are the woods tucked in the backyards, tame the front lawns of green, manicured, with a hedge and a few flowers, a well-maintained driveway, and a garage door. And the herds of pheasants running through, displaced once again as yet another new development is built, give veracity to this name, which some developer somewhere in an office in the city picked for the neighborhood. But it works somehow.

The houses aren't exactly the kind where parents hand them down to kids and family heirlooms lie stashed in the attic. There aren't any attics. There are two types of houses on the winding streets alternating between a low-lying, single story ranch with three bedrooms and a two-story colonial with four. Decent gray, blue, a few reds and maybe a white or varied hue of the basic shades, sometimes a fence, a basketball net; even though, you can walk into any of the houses and only the details belie that it is not

your own they are distinctly personal vessels of each family who has landed here.

It's the late-1960s and you have just moved in with your family, ready to enter kindergarten mid-year. The neighborhood was developed in the late 1950s so the "first" owners are the locals and then next come the young couples who bought and bore their children while already in the homes. You are one of the new kids. Your house is up a hill, take a left, then down at the end of a dead end road. On your circle, your road, are roughly twenty houses, each one filled with a family of its own. The kids gather in the circle, you go out to play, sniff around each other and the gang, already established, set in its parameters, opens and lets you in. You are the not so new kid now in the newish neighborhood in the not so new for America town. With your gang, you roam the backyard forests, play ball, do gymnastics on the front lawns until it is dark and everyone has to go in. In the winter you pull out your wooden sleds and build jumps, go flying down the hill in back that ends at the next street. Your mother gives you hot chocolate and your fingers burn and freeze as you pull off all the clothes you're bundled into. You're Jewish, your neighbors are Muslim, Irish, Italian, Russian, Portuguese, but you don't know any of that. Inside your house, you are safe and the world makes sense. Inside others it doesn't but you don't know any of that. In December, you all gather and traipse behind someone's father who is carrying a big flashlight and someone's mother who is holding a candle that keeps going out and you go from door to door, knock, and when the people answer, you sing them Christmas Carols and they give you hot chocolate.

They built the roads, built the houses, and the families came. People moved into these houses. Skin covering histories and molecules and blood pounding through veins, beating electrified miraculous hearts, great lies lived for generations, and the deepest of loves for un-parametered spaces of time. Years later, you go to Europe and teach English. There in the text book that you use to

teach is a song about ticky-tacky houses and the superficial ticky-tacky people who go about their ticky-tacky lives out in the suburbs. You can smell the smugness of the students learning the words. You feel kind of sorry for the bitterness of historical burden and images of grandeur. There will never be a grander era you think, remembering the strength you gathered, the power you reaped, the energy that was poured into you as you were shaped in one of these boxes; alongside the wandering pheasants and their show of feathers.

