

Fences

The reason my parents want to move out of the city is because they think our backyard is too small for us kids. Uncle Larry was telling my dad that kids can have more of a quality childhood if they grow up in the country, because it's safer and closer to nature. Uncle Larry lives in a town where the kids don't even have sidewalks to walk to school. They have to take a bus to school and then they can't walk home for lunch. He tells my dad that me and my brother would be a lot happier if we had more room. I'm sure my parents wouldn't listen to me, but after you spend your whole life getting to know your yard, you're close enough to nature to know what you're talking about.

The only area in our yard that's small is the back cement porch, but in the summer there's just enough room to set up our aluminum pool. The pool is over two feet deep when completely full, so it's a good size to swim around the edge and make whirlpools. It's a larger pool than Mare's. Mare is my best friend; her real name is Mary Ann but she hates to be called Mary Ann. Her pool sits on the grass because Sikorski's porch is screened in so old people can sit around. Mr. Sikorski doesn't fill the pool all the way because he thinks Mare can't swim very well, or that she's going to catch pneumonia, so she usually calls me out to use my pool. When you want to play with someone in our neighborhood, you stand by their side door and kind of sing their name in two syllables; that's "calling them out." I don't know how this system got invented, but maybe it's because if you're in a fight with one person, it really eats their heart out when they can hear you calling out somebody else on the block. When Mare and I swim, my mom sits on the brick ledge like a lounge chair and drinks ice tea and watches us. She puts on her rhinestone sunglasses, and her green and white striped swimsuit that has a top that makes her look real busty and has a skirt on the bottom. She looks super in that swimsuit.

The brick ledge encloses our porch against the house, with openings to get into the rest of the yard. If you're strong enough, you can pull yourself up on the ledge. We

live on the corner of two blocks, so we're in a prime spot to sit on the ledge and watch people go down the street. Mare and I climb up and straddle the ledge and clapping chant games we learned in school like 'See See See Hippie,' and we also jump down onto the grass. Mare is just starting to get brave enough to jump off. When my grandma sees us jump from the ledge she always says, "Heavens!" My grandma sounds funny saying things from church all the time like, "Good Lord!" The ground slopes down right where you jump, which is the dangerous part; although if you land wrong and fall, the fence saves you from rolling out onto the sidewalk and getting hurt by whatever the neighbors are playing with like a Big Wheel or a mean dog. Our fence is also high enough to keep big dogs out that might be wandering the neighborhood starving or foaming at the mouth looking for kids to attack. Mare's dad is full of useful information and he says that if you get bit by a rabid dog, you have to get 100 shots in your stomach.

My dad uses the porch ledge to set up the charcoal grill to barbecue, which can become quite an upsetting event for my dad, because the grill doesn't really fit on the ledge and sometimes tips, but that's where he wants to set it up. Barbecuing is real big with my dad, because it's things like cooking out that bring a family closer together. After supper we get to roast marshmallows on the hot coals. Mare laughs her head off when I get my marshmallow stuck in my stringy hair and it gets knotted up, then marshmallow ends up all over our doorknobs when we go in and out.

After my dad made a barbecue one day, I took a piece of charcoal out of the paper bag he left on the patio. I heard that if you bury charcoal it will eventually turn into a diamond. I knew it would take a long time and it probably wouldn't be a diamond in my lifetime, but I thought I would get it started as soon as possible, and I could at least see it turn partway into a diamond. My mom had a small flower bed just inside the gate, along the side of the house. I took one of her gardening shovels and buried the charcoal as deep as I could. I would dig it up when I was very old and see how far it had

progressed and then I would rebury it. Some day a girl will be living there digging her garden and won't she be surprised when she uncovers a huge, beautiful diamond?

Sometimes the porch is shaded over because of our big birch tree. The birch drops seed things on the ground that we call worms. Under the birch tree is my sandbox where my neighbor Jimmy and I play GI Joe and Barbie. Jimmy's mom calls him 'Jimbo' and his dad buys us orange push-ups on hot evenings when the ice cream truck comes up our street. I like Jimmy to call me out to play dolls, because he has a GI Joe-size deck of playing cards. I once read a book about a guy who had a shrinking machine and went around shrinking houses down into doll house size, and little girls played with them not realizing they were real. I always wonder where Jimmy got those cards.

Jimmy really gets on my mom's nerves. For one thing, he always looks in the trap door of the fireplace for bugs. My dad built an addition onto the middle of the back of our house so we'd have a room with a fireplace. The addition sticks out into our yard, with the porch on one side and the peach tree on the other side. To clean out the ashes from the fireplace, my dad goes outside with a tiny shovel; opens the little, black, trap door; and scoops out the ashes. It's fun to look in the door and see what's there, but when Jimmy saw a spider in there, he got scared and bit Mare's arm. Then our dog Tinker, which is a wire terrier, bit Jimmy's shoe and lost one of his teeth on Jimmy's shoelace, and Jimmy ran home crying because he had blood on his shoe. Both Mr. Sikorski and my dad made quite a production out of the whole event, and my grandma was leaning against the ledge saying, "Oh, Jesus!" I had to go in the house, which is always what happens.

When we play hide and seek, whoever is 'It' stands by the trap door to count. The fun thing to do when whoever is It is peeking, is to walk toward the peach tree until you're out of sight around the family room addition. Then you can hop the fence on the side of the house, run around the front, go back into the yard through the gate, and hide behind the porch ledge. Whoever is It searches for you behind all the bushes in the

peach tree area. It's quite hilarious to watch. Mare and I think Jimmy is a real sucker for that trick.

Jimmy and I eat lunch at my picnic table in the summer, which is also under the birch tree, and we always finish off a large can of fruit juice. It gets on my mom's nerves when we drink the entire can, but it's kind of a tradition with us. For dessert we have something my mom made out of peaches from our tree.

Our peach tree is gigantic. People walking by stop and look over the fence at the hundreds of huge peaches on it. Luckily, we have that fence to keep the stuff in our yard safe. There isn't a lock on the gate, but just having a fence kind of tells strangers, "Hey, this is my tree, my porch, my ledge, so go home and play in your own yard."

We get so many peaches on our tree, that my family could live just off the ones that fall on the ground. Sometimes I get real tired of peach jam, peach pie, peach cobbler, canned peaches, plus the itchy pickers you get on your face when you rub a peach on your lip to feel how fuzzy it is. When my dad goes up the ladder with bushel baskets, he picks enough peaches for a hundred people, so my mom gives the extras to our neighbors.

The peach tree is a fun tree to climb, and there are a lot of places to sit up there. The birch tree looks like a good tree to climb, but my dad has a fit if anybody touches it. He says there's a shortage of birches and he's afraid ours is going to catch a disease that killed lots of other birch trees. My dad has a real thing about trees, because he also planted pine trees ("evergreens," my grandma would say) along our back fence. He likes the pines tall so he can't see the "junk" in Gianelli's yard. Mr. Gianelli owns some pizza stores, so his four kids have a lot of toys piled up in their yard. When my dad planted the trees they were as tall as the fence, but now he has to trim them so they stay below the electrical wires.

There's a space of grass between the house and the pines. My dad lays out plastic in the winter and hammers boards around the edges of it. He runs water from

the hose onto the plastic and when it freezes we have a skating pond. Mrs. Polovardi watches over the fence from her yard to see me ice skate. It's quite a large rink, although when my brother and his friends are playing hockey, they don't leave room for me. If Mrs. Polovardi sees me being left out, she invites me over to play church on her enclosed back porch. Playing church is funner than going to church because we sit around singing hymns and having a tea party with her Mrs. Beasley doll.

In the summer, our swing set goes in place of the ice rink. My favorite person to swing with is Paul, who I like to embarrass by calling him Pauly Wally. He acts like he hates my guts, but he always comes over to swing and he braided me a bracelet at the summer recreation center. I wore it when my mom took me to the KMart's photo center. Sometimes I climb on the top bar of the swing set and hang upside down which Paul is way too scared to do. He's right that the swing set can be dangerous, though, because today I got my pinky finger caught in the swing chain and part of my nail ripped off when I jumped from the swing. My mom cleaned out a glass that used to have cheese spread in it and filled it with ice water. I stirred the water with my finger and made a whirlpool to watch a ribbon of blood swirl around with the ice cube. I got to sit up on the counter by the kitchen window and spy on Paul still playing in the yard. That's when my mom said I will love our new house because it has an acre of grass and no fences. She thought I was sad because my finger hurt, but actually it didn't. I went out that night and tried to dig up my charcoal to see how far it got, but I couldn't find it. I would have to leave my coal to slowly change into a diamond without me, but I'll go back and dig it up when I get old.