

Dear Mr. [Name]

I can scarcely tell you what a pleasure it was to see that picture of 3307 Gloucester Road. To this day I dream about that house. That's not all that unusual, I suppose---I gather many people dream all their lives about the place where they grew up---but I've never had anything but pleasant dreams about it. It was always a beautiful setting, chiefly because of the trees and of what my parents did with the yard. I can remember the beautiful maple in the middle of the backyard towards the rear. I had a swing on the big limb to the left as you look out towards the alley, and later a chinning bar. I remember a beautiful black-barked honeysuck tree on the south side of the lot. My parents planted two magnolias, one on either side of the backyard, that became absolutely gorgeous tall trees with stunning white blossoms. They also planted yews, a plum tree, and literally hundreds of boxwood. They loved boxwood, and my mother at one point created a small but very formal boxwood garden at the rear of the lot, by the garage, and a row of hollyhocks, evergreens, and an apple tree, at the rear of the garden along the alley. They planted wisteria that grew over the front of the garage in a very picturesque way, providing beautiful lavender blossoms in the spring.

My father built the house shortly after I was born in 1930. Until that time my parents had been living in an apartment on Confederate Avenue. They had moved to Richmond from Blacksburg when my father became editor of The Southern Planter, which had offices just behind the Governor's Mansion. I doubt that the house cost \$10,000 to build. Of course, we're talking about the trough of the Depression, but even so I think the big difference is in the cost of labor from that time to this. Until I was five my room was the middle bedroom. There was a big green awning above the three windows, and to look out over the yard from that room in the summertime was a little bit of Heaven. When my sister was born, I moved to the long bedroom on the north side. I loved that room also. In the summer I used to go to sleep listening to the sounds of the trains in the Acca yards, which were about a mile to the west and a very busy rail junction. I used to find the sounds very romantic. In September the State Fair used to come to the area where the baseball stadium now stands. In the evening I would stand at the west window and watch the fireworks that the Fair set off every night.

Between Brookland Parkway and the Fair was nothing but meadows and woods. Men used to cut the tall grass in the meadows with old-fashioned scythes. That was a very different era in many ways. By the age of nine or ten all the children in the neighborhood were allowed to go

off to the State Fair in the morning---my parents always gave me twelve nickels to spend---for a day at the Fair. Our only instructions were to be back in time for supper. There wasn't even a hint of the sort of terrors that people feel regarding their children today. Horse-drawn wagons used to come along Gloucester Road with the drivers yelling out the vegetables they had for sale. Hobos used to come through the neighborhood from Acca yards, and people on Gloucester Road and Loxley would give them sandwiches. They were not considered particularly savory characters, but neither were they considered dangerous.

I think our house was one of the first five or ten along Gloucester and Loxley. This was a development called Sherwood Park. I don't know whether the neighborhood has hung on to that name or not. In any case, no neighborhood ever had a lovelier group of people. In the twenty-five years we lived there we never had a bad neighbor. I'm so glad the Peples are still on Loxley. They were, of course, a young couple when they moved in way back when. And this was, believe me, way back when. We had a coal-burning furnace. The coal bin was in the southeast corner of the cellar. We also had an old-fashioned ice box. A couple of times a week the ice man brought an enormous block of ice which he carried on a rubber <sup>giant's</sup> apron that went across his back. He got a grip on the ice with a huge pair of tongs. The arrival of our first electric refrigerator--in the late 30s, I suppose--was quite an event.

As the thirties wore on, more and more houses were built on Gloucester, Loxley, and Brookland Parkway, and there were more and more children to play with. I remember the neighborhood as absolute paradise for children. This may be the Old Oak ~~house~~ Bucket delusion, but that's the way I remember it. There was so little traffic on Gloucester and Loxley we could ride our bicycles day and night, which we did, including the nights. One of my fondest memories is of my friends and I riding our bicycles, balloon-tire, of course, along Loxley Road at night while the fireflies twinkled among the mimosa blossoms. I hope the mimosa trees are still there. We had to stay off ~~of~~ Brookland Parkway and Westwood Avenue because of the traffic; but that was no problem, since we could always cut through the block by using the alleys. The alleys were beautifully conceived, I thought, and quite pretty as well as useful. The only problem, from a child's point of view, was the brick wall where the two alleys meet toward the north end of the block. This meant that someone driving on the alley that ran from east to west might not see a child heading north along the long alley. So until I was six or seven, I guess, I was not allowed to go from the long alley across



the east-west alley. My mother referred to it as Danger Alley. In fact, far more dangerous than Danger Alley was the practice we children had of playing on the rafters of the new houses going up in the neighborhood. Naturally our parents forbade that practice, but we were drawn irresistibly to these building sites, and death-defying rafter walks were among our favorite pastimes. Why no one was ever hurt doing this I will never know. Up until 1945 and the end of the second World War there were always plenty of vacant lots in and around the neighborhood, where we played football and basketball. One of the fathers built a basketball backboard with a four-by-four to support it, and he erected it on a lot on Brookland Parkway. We had many games of six-man football, complete with uniforms and helmets. Sometimes we played on the huge meadow on the east side of Loxley that was owned by the Seminary. In the spring and early summer in the early 1940s we played baseball every Saturday on the diamond that is now, if it still exists, under the shadow of I-95 on the Boulevard. There was no problem at all rounding up eighteen to thirty boys from Sherwood Park and Ginter Park for these games. Little Leagues didn't exist, although there were organized American Legion Leagues for youngsters. But what I will always remember are the freedom, confidence, and unfettered pleasure that we children had.

I don't want to inundate you with nostalgia, so I will wrap this up. It has always been a wonderful house and a wonderful neighborhood, and it will always have a special place in my heart. I have never been back to the house since we left there. I gather there is now an extension into the backyard on the north end. The northeast corner of the first floor originally had a study that, in fact, nobody ever used. It eventually became the piano room and then a glorified storeroom. As for the kitchen, it was never a thing of beauty by today's exalted kitchen standards, but it was always a pleasant kitchen, because it was on the corner and had nice views of the grass and trees and ever-lush foliage on Gloucester Road. I wish you luck with the boxwood. It's a tall order. My parents both loved to work on them. Once I was in my teens, I used to cut the grass myself with a hand mower. It was a good work out---I was very much into work outs at that point---and didn't take very long. One last note, and then I really will close. My father created quite a big vegetable garden in a vacant lot just north of our lot and east of the alley, fronting on Loxley. We had absolutely fresh corn, tomatoes, snap beans, strawberries, and, towards the fall, peanuts. I can still remember the ambrosial taste of all those fresh vegetables. We also had absolutely fresh chickens. My parents bought live chickens, and my father beheaded them with an axe on a stump out back of

the garage. But, then, I suppose not all the delights of yesteryear are worth reviving.

Have a wonderful time at 3307 Gloucester Road. (I can still remember our telephone number, 4-5019.) In the late 1940s my parents briefly entertained the notion of moving to the West End. Both my sister and I begged them not to. We loved it where we were. So my parents stayed there until my father retired in 1957, and they moved to the Shenandoah Valley. Some years later they moved back to Richmond and bought a house out on Cary Street Road. My father died in 1972, and my mother now lives in North Carolina, not far from my sister and her family. I still visit Richmond at least once a year. I'm always delighted to see that physically, in any case, the city has not changed all that much since my childhood. That's all you can ask of your old stomping grounds---assuming you enjoyed them---i.e., that they not change too much.

*With the very best wishes*

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Wolfe". The signature is highly cursive and fluid, with long, sweeping lines that extend across the width of the page.

Tom Wolfe  
21 East 79th Street  
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