

Corner houses (and others) in which I have lived

Bill Reimer

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Hi Samantha,

I know what you mean about the disadvantage of corner houses after a snowfall – too many sidewalks! I have lived in three corner houses – and fortunately only one of them was in snow country. What was even nicer was that the one in snow country was shared with another family, so I didn't have to do all the shoveling. Most of the houses I lived in were not on the corner, however.



The first house I lived in was on 11th Ave near Commercial Drive in Vancouver. I remember it as a big house with a huge back yard (I thought of it as an orchard) - but when I visited it a few years ago, it was just a small house with a tiny backyard.



I have a couple of pictures of it here - one when I was a small boy on the porch with my brother and a friend and the other one from a few years ago. I loved to see that the 'sun porch' at the back was still there. I think that was where my bedroom was.

In 1950, when I was about 6 years old we moved to the house in Kerrisdale that was near your old house on 41st. This was the one that was an old farmhouse - with a nice large porch at the front and another one just outside from the kitchen in the back. I have a picture of it where you and your brothers are in the front yard. Do you remember it? Dad built a nice workshop in the basement since he always wanted to fix things. We loved it because it was just across the street from the school and we could sleep in each morning until we heard the school bell for classes. We usually had to rush our breakfast, but we could easily come home for lunch.



When I was about 10 years old the house next door came up for sale. Dad and Mum decided to buy it because it had a bit more room. This was my first corner house. It was also a house on a steep hill that we used for all sorts of adventures - like riding a soap box down the hill. This was my first 'corner house' but it had a long sidewalk along the side. Luckily, it didn't snow much, but as you can see from the photo, it happened occasionally!

When I graduated from elementary school in 1956, I went to high school that was far from Kerrisdale. Mum and Dad had decided to move - and this time they moved to Marpole so that Dad could open a small fix-it business. That meant I would go to a brand new high school (it was just built). However, none of my friends from Kerrisdale were going there. I remember the first few months being very stressful

and lonely since everything was new for me. I guess you felt like this when you went to Victoria from Vancouver.

The new house in Marpole was my second corner house. I loved that it had a big back yard with trees to climb in (one of them was a walnut tree). It also had a little shed at the back that we used for a clubhouse – until Dad filled it up with the lawn mower and garden stuff. This was the house where my brothers and I made the ‘man in a box’ and scared the neighbor kids with firecrackers. It was on the corner where the current apartment is now located. I can only remember having to shovel snow on that corner a couple of years. It was partly because there were only a few years with snow before I moved out to live in a small basement room closer to the university in January 1965. It’s also the same year that Fran and I started going together.



When I lived in this basement suite I didn't have to shovel snow since it was the landlord that took care of this. It was a nice setup for a young person since I lived with 2 other students. We each had our own bedroom but we shared the laundry area as a place to eat and had a small shower and toilet area. It was rather rustic, but it was fun because we were on our own and enjoying the life of university students. This picture is one of me outside the house where I lived – just before I was to fly to Toronto for a student meeting.



From there I moved in with Fran as a newly married couple in 1967. This place was down near Kitsilano beach in the top floor of a nice old house. It had a small balcony that overlooked Kitsilano, English Bay, Stanley Park, and the north



mountains. It was beautiful. We didn't even mind that the kitchen was about the size of a small boat galley. I have included a picture of the outside of the house along with one that shows you the view we had from our little balcony. If you look carefully at the former you can see Fran looking out the window.

When Fran got pregnant with your mother, we moved to a house in Marpole since it was a bit bigger. This wasn't a corner house either so the little bit of snow we had there was easy to clean. We shared the house with another couple who lived in the basement - but the relationship with them didn't turn out so well. That's another story for another time, though. This picture is one of your mother and one of the neighbor kids that babysat her. It was taken well after we had moved out of the house since your mother was only 9 months old when we moved to our next house.



Since most of our time was spent at UBC, we decided to move closer to the university. After looking around for a while we found a nice house to rent on 15th avenue. Daegan was 9 months old, so this would make it 1970. The house was in the middle of the block - with a couple of lovely trees out front. Not much snow there as well. We had some of our friends stay with us since there was an apartment in the basement. For a while, even John's girlfriend lived there.

It was nicely close to UBC. I remember seeing Fran ride her bicycle slowly up the steep hill on 16th avenue with Daegan sitting in the kid seat on the back and Samwise running alongside.



When I got a job in Montreal in 1972, we packed up all our stuff, got into our VW van, and drove across the country (stopping off to attend Jim and Marilyn's wedding in Sicamous). We moved into a corner house on Terrbonne St. - and I learned what a snowfall really meant.



I remember well the first major snowfall we had. There was so much snow that it covered the cars along the street. The photo I have included doesn't show a huge snowfall, but you can see that we still had lots of fun playing in it. You can even see Samwise out there with us. Since his tail is up and curling we knew he was enjoying the excitement. People had to spend much of their time shoveling out their cars - especially when the city equipment started moving up the street. JP was born when we lived in this house.

I remember getting up from our dinner one day because of the noise outside. It was from one of the little sidewalk caterpillar tractors that they use to clean off the walks here. It rattled down the sidewalk pushing the snow into the curb - and was followed by a huge snowplow that scraped the snow out of the gutter and moved it into a long pile near the middle of the road. This was followed by another huge grader that pushed the pile back in a neat row a few feet out from the curb.

Then along came a worker with an orange vest over his snow suit - walking backwards while checking out the pile of snow for stray garbage, pets, or people. This was because he was followed by a monster snowblower that sucked up the snow and blew it into a huge dumptruck that drove along beside. This was followed by about 8 or 10 other trucks - all waiting for their turn to fill up. It was like a huge parade just outside our house - a parade of snowclearing equipment - that left a path of bare road in its wake. All that was left for us who lived on the corner house was to clear the walkway to our doors.

When we moved to Isle Bigras in 1974 the challenge of snow clearing changed again. There were no sidewalks, but I had to clear at least a couple of ruts so the car could get out of the garage. Usually, it meant shoveling very deep snow since it would drift in deep heaps across the driveway. If you look carefully at the photo you will see Fran cleaning the snow off the car. I was taking the picture after shoveling one of the ruts. I will have to finish the second one before we can take the car out. You can also see that we didn't bother shoveling the path up to the front door!



In 1978 I had my first sabbatical and we decided to spend it in Cap-Saint-Ignace – a small village just downstream from Quebec City (but on the other side of the river. We found an old farmhouse for rent right near the train station that was no longer in use. JP started in grade 1 that year – and he was the only English-speaking child in his class. In fact, no-one in the village could speak English (even his teacher), so he had to learn the hard way. Luckily he could learn much faster than I could. It helped that he found friends nearby and spent a lot of time playing with them.



We would get LOTS of snow in Cap-St-Ignace. I have included a photo of the main street after a rather large snowfall. You can see that the snow blower has had to cut a long channel in the snowdrifts just to keep the roads clear. That was the year that Fran's Mum, Dad, and brother Peter came to join us for Christmas – and some of us got stranded with Jack in Québec City on Christmas morning. You can read about it in the "Stories for my Grandchildren" section of my website (<http://billreimer.ca>). It's

titled "Christmas in Cap-St-Ignace).

Living in a snowy part of the world means that everything takes an extra effort in winter. That was why I was not looking forward to getting home to Ile Bigras from our trip to the west coast about 7 years ago. It meant I would have to shovel the snow just to get INTO the house! Imagine our surprise when the taxi pulled up to our house and we found the whole driveway nicely cleaned – even though Montréal had just had a big snowfall. I breathed a sigh of relief but it left us with a huge mystery. Who had done this for us?

I checked around with all our friends to see if we could get an answer - but to no avail. No-one knew how it got cleared.

It was about two weeks later that I finally got an answer - this time after another snow storm - when I heard some noise outside and looked out to see Jody Aldous in his truck with a plow on the front (Jody is Megan's father). When I ran out to talk to him he said it was "payback" for our kindness to him and his friends when they spent so much time playing basketball on the concrete pad by our house. I was thrilled!



So you see that your experience with snow clearing on a corner lot is part of a long tradition in your family! In fact, if you ask your mother she will tell you that one of the reasons she decided to move to the west coast was because she didn't want to shovel snow any more. Maybe that's the reason you have had to bear the burden of it this time around!

Love,
Bill