When a Negro Moves Next Door

By ELLSWORTH E. ROSEN with Arnold Nicholson

A Baltimore resident tells how his neighborhood welcomes Negro homeowners—and keeps white families from moving away.

I live in what is known as a "changing neighborhood" in Baltimore. In short, a Negro family has bought a house down the street.

The color of my neighbor's skin does not bother me at all. His income and behavior are just about the same as mine. But the economic threat his presence has created for me, and for the entire community, is disturbing. A lot of people who live somewhere else have assumed that our pleasant, middle-class neighborhood is headed for all-Negro occupancy and rapid deterioration as properties pass from financially strong hands to less responsible ownership. The pattern is a familiar one in many big cities of the North.

We were enmeshed in the initial, frightening stages of this process just a year ago. "The dark cloud," we were told, "had descended." Our neighborhood, however, has refused to accept this verdict for the future. We believe that a mixture of white and Negro families is both inevitable and compatible with good living, and have succeeded, after quite a struggle, in proving our point to date. The all-Negro "cloud," we hope, may never descend simply because we and increasing numbers of Baltimoreans understand the forces at work, the threat to the future of the city and are agreed that some solution must be found.

The most heartening support for our acceptance of racial integration has come from the Greater Baltimore Committee, a group of nearly 100 of the city's business leaders. These men, until they were confronted with the problem of "changing neighborhoods," had concentrated their energies on the rebuilding of downtown. Now, thanks largely to G.B.C., a city-wide private agency is being created to work with neighborhoods like ours.

We do not think for a moment that all the members of G.B.C., or even a majority of Baltimore citizens, presently share our personal biracial views. But they are at least willing to listen and to consider our proposals for a solution. Neither can they deny that we have shown a
Ashburton boys, after school. At present, only five per cent of the families are Negro.

The author's four-year-old daughter Joy (above, right) and neighborhood playmates.

“A mixture of white and Negro families is compatible with good living,” says Rosen, whose son Danny (above, left) is shown here with Tyrone Carroll, a neighbor's child.

Below: Otho Pinkett (left) of the Ashburton Area Association reassures fellow residents. "To protect your way of life," he says, "continue living in your own home."
April 6, 1959

When a Negro Moves Next Door

(Continued from Page 32)

measure of success. Enough of us, in enough "changing neighborhoods," are fighting the all-white, all-black concept to bring the topic soberly out in the open, in the press and on our television, and then let it have it confined to bitter words about "the black tide" or about segregation, voiced by one race or the other.

The battle in our neighborhood, known as Ashburton, began with a young lawyer and myself. We and our wives—who got small groups, covering Ashburton block when we called a score of our neighbors and their families whose class or race excites fear or avowedly open to both races, and invited Association, the first local association values. It had become almost epidemic breaking real-estate agents and speculators. Homes, enrolled 400 members.

We had spent months in house hunting, much of the time in the newly bulldozed developments in the suburbs beyond the city limits, known in Baltimore as "in the counties." Our goal was a house of three bedrooms for the two children—a boy seven and a girl four—and ourselves, at around $20,000. We went from one sprawl of look-alike ranchers and split-levels to another. The prices usually included a thousand or two above our figure; the travel time to our office was at least a half hour and generally more; the schools were mostly on double shifts; and life with only one car looked rough.

And so we bought in Ashburton. We bought our two half baths in our home. And prices were about a third less than those asked for new homes with the same amount of space.

The battle in our neighborhood, known as Ashburton, began with a young lawyer and myself. We and our wives—who got small groups, covering Ashburton block when we called a score of our neighbors and their families whose class or race excites fear or avowedly open to both races, and invited Association, the first local association values. It had become almost epidemic breaking real-estate agents and speculators. Homes, enrolled 400 members.

We had spent months in house hunting, much of the time in the newly bulldozed developments in the suburbs beyond the city limits, known in Baltimore as "in the counties." Our goal was a house of three bedrooms for the two children—a boy seven and a girl four—and ourselves, at around $20,000. We went from one sprawl of look-alike ranchers and split-levels to another. The prices usually included a thousand or two above our figure; the travel time to our office was at least a half hour and generally more; the schools were mostly on double shifts; and life with only one car looked rough.

The process was almost painful to watch. As soon as one house on a block was sold to a Negro, swarms of agents put up "sold" signs on homes which had not been sold; and agents broke out in active and concentrated lobbying campaigns, or often telephone, with the information that the house was now "sold." Negotiations were rumored to be for sale for every one prospecting only at night. Our new neighbors greeted us with more than usual enthusiasm, but almost from the first day wondered audibly how long they could hold out against the situation, even though they "loved the neighborhood." The process was almost painful to watch. As soon as one house on a block was sold to a Negro, swarms of agents went on a house-to-house campaign, spreading the news and warning residents to put their houses up for sale "while you can still get the price." In adjoining blocks the salesmen we called the Paul Revere type would begin a doorbell campaign, or often telephone, with the information, "They're coming, they're coming." Some brokers, when they got listings, refused to show the homes to white prospects. Specialists in Negro housing, obviously aware of the panic value, put up "sold" signs on homes which had not really been sold.

A few speculators purchased homes in strategic areas and moved in low-income Negro families on a weekly-rental basis. Other overambitious Negro families were persuaded to buy under contract agreements requiring no down payment and monthly installments "just like rent." The terms of these contracts, in most instances, made it almost impossible for the hard-pressed family to build up any
Brushing with Colgate helps give the surest protection all day long!*
ruled the Sold By signs illegal, and as complaints poured into the Bureau of Building Inspection, notices of violations went out and the signs disappeared. The local Real Estate Board co-operated by instructing its members—which did not as a rule include the firms we objected to—to comply, but at the same time called for the drafting of an ordinance which would make Sold signs legal. The city council, as this is written, has not taken action.

The most striking effect of the ban on Sold signs occurred in one block in which fifteen of twenty-three properties were posted as either For Sale or Sold. Two weeks after the city took action there were just six houses marked for sale.

Windsor Hills has taken a step which our association has been hesitant to follow, but which now seems inevitable. Their real-estate committee has appointed a resident agent to represent them and to promote sales and rentals. The average outside agent is unwilling either to recommend the area to white buyers, or to risk his time on an obviously difficult, lengthy sale.

"A sale to a white family takes endless discussions," Mrs. Estelle Sachs, the agent, told me. "Most people who look in our area are liberal-minded, but their liberalism has to be strengthened. The person I am most afraid of is the one who says, 'Oh, this wouldn't affect me at all.' This person almost always comes up later with an excuse that he doesn't mind the Negro living next to Negroes, but his wife or his children are too young.

"When you sell to one of these friends of the community you know his friends become our best prospects. I am thinking of one couple who wanted to live in Windsor Hills because it was close to where they worked. The couple did not mind the situation, but the wife's family was dead set against it. They were East-

TRUST HIM TO GET YOUR CAR READY FOR SPRING

He's the MoPar man with a special checkup for your Plymouth, Dodge, DeSoto, Chrysler or Imperial

For most motorists, this is spring change-over time. With the severe winter just past, it's a time when your car needs a checkup from a true specialist.

"The MoPar man in your community—you dealer in Plymouth, Dodge, DeSoto, Chrysler or Imperial cars—is that type of specialist. He knows what it takes. He works with MoPar products, precisely engineered for your car by Chrysler Corporation, and with the latest, factory-approved equipment.

Because he knows your car so well, the MoPar man saves you money. His keen eye spots trouble before it can develop into a major repair bill. He uses all his experience and skill to keep your car operating safely, efficiently and at low cost.

Your confidence is well placed in the MoPar man. He's your car's best friend in the spring—and all the year around!

Drive in for your spring checkup today.

KEEP YOUR CAR LOOKING NEW WITH MOPAR POLISHES AND CLEANERS
My Ambition is to Quit (Continued from Page 31)

can't make the kind of money I make, but at least he can stay in one place all the time.

It's the money—and nothing but the money—that keeps me in baseball today. I have no desire to die in harness. I'm like a boxer who lives for the time he can hang up his gloves, but I don't have the money to do so. I can't earn as much doing anything else, and neither can I.

I don't need anywhere near as much as I make to live on. But I do need what's left over to provide a measure of future security for my family. Until that's pretty well assured, I can't afford to do it yet.

Then I'll get out of baseball—and I mean totally out. I don't want to be a manager, coach, scout, or general manager, traveling secretary, league president, commissioner or batboy. My ambition is to be a fan, with the privilege of going to a ball game because I feel like it, not because it's my business. I'll have some good baseball years left when I do hang up my spikes. I'll always be a fan of it.

In 1955 I got my first year in baseball with the Cleveland Indians' slugger, who quit in 1955 at the age of thirty, long before he had reached the end of the trail. When I first heard he intended to get out, I didn't believe it because I didn't think anyone else in baseball felt the way I did.

"I've had it," he told me one day in 1955. "I'm going to retire at the end of the season."

"Then I'll beat you to it," I said. "You'll still be playing long after I'm through." I meant it. I really thought he would. But Rosen stuck to his decision. I'm still wishing for the day when I can do the same, and settle down to a normal family life with my wife and children.

My wife is the former Zoe Ann Olsen, who was famous in her own right as an Olympic diving star when I married her in 1949. I'd known her since she was a little girl. She had been a baby girl, I think, in connection of a comment by a fellow Soreno in our yellow Cadillac convert-

"How's Zoe?" she asked.


"We were all worried about her."

"Why?"

"She had pneumonia. Didn't you know?"

Then there was the time I called her in the spring of 1957 and a neighbor answered the phone. "Where's Zoe?"

"She's in the hospital."

"What happened?"

"She broke her ankle skiing," the lady said.

It was the same old story. All the bad news was usually from the neighbors. So did all the help. I don't know what we'd have done without them. The only time Zoe ever told me about something that was going on at school, I knew it was bad news. She was a good student, and I had always assumed she was happy and content.

"Can't hear you, honey," I said. "I'll tell the operator to put in the call again on a better line."

She cleared her throat, then, in a stronger voice, she said, "Is this better?"

"Much," I said. We talked for a few minutes, and I hung up. I got home later, and a few days after that I ran into a neighbor.

"How's Zoe?" she asked.

"Fine," I said. "And it was worse than the last time, wasn't it?"

"Much worse," she murmured.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I demanded. "I knew we'd be having trouble if you got home," she said, and I didn't want to worry you.

When I first started out in baseball, I never foresaw this sort of thing. All I thought about was what a great thing it must be to win fame and fortune as a big league star. Zoe was my idol, Joe DiMaggio, who had played for the San Francisco Seals when I was a kid. When I said, "Tell me, Joe," she had just begun a western trip. Her voice sounded odd.

"Are you sick?" I asked. "I'm all right," she said. "You don't sound right."

"Well, I am," she insisted.

Two weeks later she met me at Boston's Back Bay station. Her face was pale and she looked thin. "You look as if you had pneumonia again," I said. She nodded.

"The only time Zoe ever told me about something that was going on at school, I knew it was bad news. She was a good student, and I had always assumed she was happy and content."