

Laundromat

3624 Overland Drive, Palms, California. Los Angeles County. That was my first apartment. I married and moved next to a junk yard. Across the street was a party store. Larry did not want to locate in downtown Los Angeles which would have been closer to Mom's apartment. A few months later, kitty-corner to the apartment building, a brand new laundromat opened. Until then, Larry would come home after working long hours, picked up the laundry and headed for the laundromat several miles away. We only had one car and there were lots of cloth diapers in those days. My baby, Robin, was just over 3 months old.

It was a challenging year; the marriage, the baby, the long hours spent alone - lots of time for reflection. John Kennedy was assassinated and the whole world seemed to be in a state of flux. There was a lot to think about but that morning I was excited about being able to do my own laundry and perhaps having an adult meaningful conversation.

Jade, the manager was the only one at the laundromat when I entered. Charlotte came in and we all began a conversation or rather, Jade talked and we listened.

"I took my grandchildren to see that Disney film and do you know that theater had the children sitting in the aisles. Well, they were packed in

there so tight you couldn't hardly move around so, well, I talked to the manager but he didn't do a thing; so, I called the fire department and don't you know they were down there and gave that manager a working over and..."

I admired Jade. She was a modern-day woman; single, self-reliant and bold. She had the qualities I lacked. Then about the time I was folding diapers and stacking them in the basket,

"...by the way, you live in that apartment building across the street?"

"Yes," I said nodding my head.

"Well, you seen that couple - he's tall and dark-complected. I didn't get a good look at her though."

"I don't see anyone during the day," I replied.

"I am going to talk to that manager and give her a piece of my mind. Letting people like that into this neighborhood...she needs to get rid of those people or I'll..."

I looked at Charlotte. She was as startled as I was.

"...can't she rent to someone decent...nicely dressed couple but..."

my mind stuck on the word "neighborhood". I grew up in a neighborhood. It had houses with green lawns and streets where children could play baseball. Neighbors talked to each other over backyard fences.

Lady, this was not a neighborhood and if it had been?

Charlotte looked at me, "I'm sure they're nice people..."

"Oh, sure," said Jade, "like I said, they were dressed nice but you know, colored..."

That night I wanted to share my experience with Larry but he always said how naïve I was about the world.

I hadn't been around enough to know!

He was exhausted from pushing heavy equipment around in the sun for almost 14 hours. He bathed, and he ate. Almost immediately, he was asleep. And I pondered. What was happening to me, to us, was a small bit of the entire country. I didn't realize it then. Grandma must have been saying her prayers. We would escape the Los Angeles riots of 1965 and the racial tension.

A few weeks passed.

"I think we're moving," Larry said. "I saw a new apartment complex in San Fernando. The office wants me to deliver equipment back and forth between here and there. We could use the extra money. We can go this weekend to look at the apartments."

We bought furniture and signed papers. The new place on Sheldon Valley Road had other families with small children and no junk yards. It was March. Larry was born in March. We were married in March.

"March is the month of changes," his mother had once said.

We packed the last of our belongings. The car pulled out of the parking lot and I looked at the Laundromat one more time. Jade was standing by the window and checking us out. I waved and she turned away.

"Who are you waving at?"

"Oh, you know, I told you about the woman who called the fire department on that theater manager."

"Yeah. You have to be careful about people like that. That's why Kennedy got shot."

"Yes." I said and wished I could have told him everything.

Well, Jade, we're going. Now, you won't have to call the manager about renting to people like us.