

PLACES I'VE LIVED

BY DON SWAIM

BRIEF ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO MANY OF HOUSES I LIVED IN OVER TIME

The earliest...



Don, backyard, playing in hose. Wichita, Kansas, 1938. Lived in Wichita for a mere two years until my father moved the family to Illinois. Adorable kid. Had he only grown up to amount to something. Note the grass growing in the driveway. Obviously a rental house.



Olney, Illinois, sandbox, side yard. 1940. Don with father. Don's brother, Steve, was born here (no, not in the sandbox). My father sold oil-field pumping equipment. Southern Illinois had substantial oil fields at the time. This house was also a rental, and we later moved to a lesser one near the railroad tracks, where my tricycle got stuck in a pile of old tin cans. When my mother and I went back to get the trike it was gone.



The family's house at 3637 Grantley Rd., Toledo, Ohio, 1943. The nearby intersection used to flood creating a terrific (for kids) lake. I entered the first grade from this house. There was a Victory Garden in the back. My mother would can the vegetables from the garden and store them in the basement, where there was a coal furnace. Every week a truck would back into the driveway and they'd dump coal down a chute into the basement coal bin. I owned a child-sized wicker straight chair and matching rocking chair my parents gave to me. I don't know what prompted me, but for some reason I took both chairs and stuffed them into the roaring furnace to watch them burn. What goes on in the mind of a kid? My parents never said a word about it. I don't think they realized the chairs were gone. My dad worked hard and my mother played bridge.



Nineteen forty-six. My father's job took us to Houston, Texas, where, after WWII he built a house with a faux Spanish influence at 1334 Dorrington Road, near what is now the huge Texas Medical Center complex. A Yankee-style house, two stories, screened-in porch, and no air conditioning. I think it's now a beauty parlor. My brother and I went to nearby Roberts Elementary School. It snowed one day, a few stingy snowflakes, and because the kids had never seen snow they let us out of class to experience it. I, of course, was a blasé Yankee, quite familiar with snow, and contemptuous of my classmates' naiveté.



Toledo, ca. 1949 —my dog Smokey was murdered by a bigger dog near this house.

When we moved back to Toledo, Ohio, we lived at 3811 Elmhurst Rd. Terrible house. The city bus would rumble up our street and the vibrations could be felt even in the back bedrooms. Lot narrow, hardly any clearance between houses. In the photo, my mother's seen in the doorway. Next to me are my baby brother Steve and my best friend Tom Josephsen. In my unpublished novel *To Be Announced*, the character Charlie becomes a radio star in the Boy Scouts and gets his own teen deejay show. That was Tom. He was my age, but note how much taller and handsomer he was—and more accomplished. I don't believe Tom ever went into broadcasting professionally, and, from what I understand, is involved in the travel business in one of the Carolinas.



Next, we went to Pittsburgh, where my father built a house at 363 Fox Chapel Rd., Fox Chapel Borough (above), in 1953. We had two and a half wooded acres with a stream, and I was required to cut the huge lawn single-handedly with a hand-mower. Later, my father splurged and bought two gasoline-powered mowers. Even with the two of us it was an exhausting, all-weekend chore to maintain the grounds (which is why I now pay to have my lawn cut — I don't even own a mower and never will). There was minimal public transportation and I had to hitchhike three hilly miles to high school in Aspinwall along the Allegheny River. The school no longer exists as such and is currently a “coordinated high school,” ironically now within walking distance of this house.



Above, the house in Fox Chapel in 2004, looking much the same as when it was first built. Photo by my high school pal Bob Grimes. It was while my parents were living in Pittsburgh that I went to Ohio University to study journalism. Eventually, they returned to Houston while I remained up north to work in broadcasting, a job my father once described as “unnatural.” My parents are buried in Houston and my brother lives on a man-made lake in Montgomery, north of the city. *Apparently, there are no photos of Don’s abodes in Huntington, W. VA, or Dover, DE.*

Arriving in York, PA, to work at WORK, the NBC affiliate, I first rented a room at the Y, then a room in a private residence, and finally to a studio apartment at 44 E. Philadelphia Street, which is no longer there. Below, entering my E. Philadelphia Street apartment ca 1964. The shot was taken by my barber whose shop was next door



3014 N. Calvert St., Baltimore (below). My apartment is on the second floor with the bay window. On the street in front is a black VW beetle. That’s mine. I loved this apartment, although the flat below was rented by music majors at Johns Hopkins who staged uproarious parties to which I was not invited. This building is now gone.



1652 Hardwick Road, Baltimore. A row house—or what would be called a townhouse elsewhere. Nothing fancy. Neighbors on either side were milkmen who worked for the same dairy. The rent was \$125 a month. One bathroom but there was a toilet in the basement.



Below, Don (in antique tie) standing in front of his twelfth-floor apartment building at 306 E. 86th Street at Second Avenue, NYC, 1967. A one bedroom on the twelfth floor. Lousy, overpriced apartment. Incredible street noise. The guy who became my barber lived in a better apartment in the same building.



But things improved. where, after a year, I braved a move to the Upper West Side.

788 Columbus Avenue, 14th floor, Park West Village, on the West Side [center building, above, 1968]—when the neighborhood was often described as a no-man’s land, but is now lively and gentrified. Seven buildings designed for families, with such amenities as a tennis club, dime store, grocery store, pub, etc. Looks massive and Kremlin-like imposing but high-rise livable, most with terraces (balconies).



With still-motion photography, above is the view toward the east from the front windows of Apt. 14-0, 788 Columbus Ave. in Park West Village. The tall building in the center beyond Central Park is Mt. Sinai Hospital and the bridge behind it is the Triboro. This once glamorous view has been obliterated by over-building and greed by developers, who destroyed this effort at urban community.



In 1992, I moved six blocks south to the above building, 201 W. 92 St., first to a second-floor one bedroom in the rear, later to a nicer two bedroom on the third floor in the front. Just above the tree to the far left are the windows of my apartment. I loved this modest, solid building, constructed in 1929, and would walk home to it daily after work from the CBS building on West 52nd Street, a zestful two miles. No view, no terrace, but it may have been the best house in Manhattan I ever lived in.



In 1998, I bought my first house, heavily mortgaged—in Bucks County, PA, which used to be semi-rural, but is now almost like everywhere else. The house sits on a lot of just under an acre, and has a pretty little storage shack in the rear.

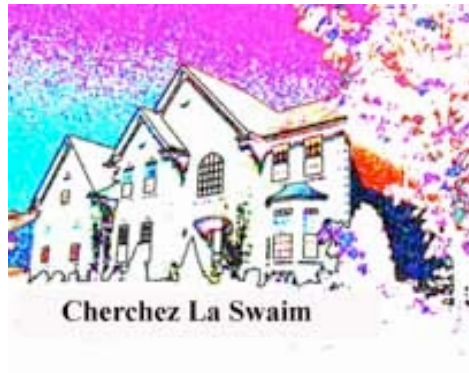


103 Janton Way, New Britain Township, PA in winter.



Don and Barack relax with drinks on the patio

THE LAST IS YET TO COME



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