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MY TURN

■ **Dmae Roberts**



Changing neighborhoods, changing city

I knew something was up when Richard, my husband, spotted two people taking photos of my next-door neighbor's house.

"I think they're realtors," he said.

The next day, a "For Sale" sign went up in the front yard.

Over the past few years, we've become accustomed to realtors canvassing our southeast Portland neighborhood trying to locate people open to selling their home. We receive several fake personalized letters and postcards in cursive print each week from "independent" citizens who claim to have "passed by" and fell in love with our house.

I bought my home in 1991 when I was single. It cost \$45,000. It was a struggle to get the down payment together, but I did it. Even though a 30-year mortgage freaked me out, I was tired of spending money on rent, so I found the perfect small home I could afford. At least this way, I reasoned, I'd have something called "equity." Richard and I didn't marry until the latter part of the '90s. He too was a homeowner when we merged our lives and incomes. Years later we paid off our mortgages.

Before marrying Richard, I didn't get along with my next-door neighbors. I was a single woman living next to a traditional Greek family. Our cultures and my single status didn't mix. But that changed after I got married. We became amicable and respectful to each other, reaching a détente of sorts over past misunderstandings. Even though we may have had difficulties, I loved having a diverse neighborhood.

When I spoke with my neighbor, she confirmed what I've heard from many people. Now that they're older and their kids have families of their own, they want to downsize and simplify their lives by moving into a smaller place closer to their children.

I hugged her and told her I understood. Yet I still felt some grief, not just about losing my neighbors, but also about how my neighborhood — and my city

— has changed during the last 10 years. So much so I don't recognize much of Portland's cityscape nowadays.

Portland had a few tall buildings when I moved here. Now when I drive over the Marquam Bridge, I see dozens of high-rise buildings and more of them are being built throughout the downtown and south waterfront areas.

Neighborhoods, including mine, are becoming lined with three-story row houses. It feels like just about every block in Portland is undergoing some type of construction. Anytime someone sells a home or a precious vacant lot, row houses go up, or four- to five-story condominiums, without parking. In an effort to encourage residents to use public transportation, neighborhoods like mine have turned into bumper-to-bumper cars because now there are few driveways or garages for them.

I have little doubt when my Greek neighbor's house sells, it will be bought by one of the more affluent white people moving into neighborhoods, who frequently displace people of color. One only has to walk to north Portland — in particular the Mississippi and Alberta areas — to see the dramatic impact gentrification has had on the once vibrant African-American community. When people of color have moved out of my neighborhood, usually a wealthier white resident has replaced them.

It took years for me and my neighbors to navigate our proximity to become good and respectful neighbors. I watched their children grow up and saw them visit with their own children. I can't help but feel I'm losing a family member, perhaps not a close one emotionally, but certainly close in location.

I hope we get along well with our new neighbors. But lately, Richard and I too have been thinking about leaving, not just this neighborhood, but Portland itself, as it becomes more crowded, less diverse, and increasingly unrecognizable each day.

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