

Open Letter from Carol Gordon Loopstra to her parents, Gary & Doris Gordon

*Note: My parents moved to a retirement home (Asbury Methodist Home) on October 22, 2015, and subsequently sold their house in Washington Grove (known to the family as Oak Manor). This is a letter I wrote to my parents (and for our family) in thanks for the home they gave us for 46 wonderful years. I hope you enjoy walking through the house with us one last time.*

Dear Father and Mother,

Friday, October 16, 2015

Thank you for giving us a wonderful, happy, and safe haven called HOME! Oak Manor was *your* home for forty-six years. For us children, it was *our* home for many of those years, but also it became a *home-away-from-home* while in places like Brazil and Ecuador, and from as far away as Thailand, Greenland, and Iraq.

How good it was to always have a place to call “our *home*”. Through the woodsy Washington Grove we would come, down Maple or Ridge Road to 400 Center Street at the very end. (Why would we want to go any further?) I never realized until I got older that not everyone was blessed with so many oak trees in their yard. Sure, the leaves were a big chore to rake (and of course, I didn’t appreciate the work required as a kid), but that’s what made Fall - Fall! I am ever so thankful to have grown up with such a stark reminder of the Autumn season. When I think of the yard at Oak Manor, I see not only the oaks and the yew shrubs, but all the trees and plants that were there before – the pink and white dogwoods, the Japanese maple, the big huge conifer (was it a spruce or hemlock?) in the southwest corner, the daffodils, the irises, the peonies, the roses, the forsythia, and of course the lily-of-the-valley by the front driveway.

We children have so many memories of arriving through the red front door with its “Gordon” sign swaying and clanking against the wood — to be greeted with wide open arms and loving hugs and kisses from you! How many others came through that big red door? – All of us children, siblings, parents, in-laws, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, relatives, friends, fiancées, and sojourners from far away. You gave the “Gordon” name much of which to be proud!

The living room was truly a family room for cherished gatherings, the place where we caught up with one another, sang and prayed together, played musical instruments and games, talked for many hours on all topics. The piano was truly a “keynote speaker” (had to get one pun in) in the history of that room. I never can understand those people who have pianos in their houses but “nobody” plays it. What a blessing it always was to hear such well-played melodies emanating throughout the house from that piano - sacred and classical music, songs from musicals, Christmas carols, well-loved hymns, old familiar songs from the past, songs everywhere from “He’s Everything to Me” to “The New Jerusalem”. I can remember times when I was sick or not feeling well and someone in the house would be playing the piano - what a comfort for the soul.

There was a lot of activity around that strong and sturdy coffee table. Norman and I played countless games of Jack Straws on it, along with other two-person games. Then at Christmas time, it held the bowl of mixed nuts which we all enjoyed cracking, plus the walnut stuffed dates that Mom and I usually made. It held tea and snacks for us and guests, and held up well with

youngsters playing toys on and around it. And it held the large picture books and photo albums that gave rise to many conversations and memories shared.

I can still see you, Father, in your big recliner chair, deep in thought and launching warmly into long conversation with us about science, religion, finances, canoeing, or whatever concerns were on your family's minds. Many a letter was read aloud from that chair. I'm glad you had your chair too, Mom, always rocking with joy to see us, while always ready to jump up and tend the kitchen if needed.

In my mind, the fireplace still glows with late-night embers from an expertly-made fire, to roast marshmallows or just to give us warmth and a cozy atmosphere. Thanks, Father, for all the wood you chopped and stored and carried up the stairs! The hearth was a favorite place for lingering and pondering many things. I can still see hanging over the fireplace that large framed painting of ocean waves at sea, and at Christmastime, the string of Christmas ornaments below, along with the sparkle and pine scent of a real Christmas tree close by. And now there's the mantle that has held the photos of family and loved ones. Even the carpeted floor was a welcoming place with that round multi-colored, latch hook rug that became the center of our play, our games and toys, our oratory performance in charades, or just a place for Mittens to curl up and sleep. And far above, just near the ceiling, still remains the decorative stenciling that Mom and I painted years ago – one of the many happy memories of mother-daughter times.

We thank you for the kitchen and all the nourishing meals so lovingly prepared for us, morning, noon and evening. Thanks, Mom, for your countless hours of cooking, baking, and cleaning, and making sure we had nourishing, balanced and delicious meals – meal-in-a-dish egg casserole, topsy turvy tuna lemon pie, the sausage-sweet-potato-apple dish, that weird looking but absolutely yummy homemade lentil soup, Anadama bread, and so much more. Thanks for putting up with all our interruptions and walking *through* the kitchen. Thanks Father, for making sure we had the finances to always have plenty of food at hand. Just as importantly, this kitchen was the place that we kids learned how to cook (thanks for letting us experiment!), how to prepare our lunches and of course, how to clean up! Although doing dishes was not our favorite task, I do have some fond memories of plenty of laughter with my brothers as we worked side-by-side. I have so many good memories in the kitchen with you, Mom. You taught me how to cut with a sharp knife, how to peel vegetables, shuck corn, cook rice, mix cookie dough and cut in the butter, how to polish silver and properly set the table.

We are so thankful for the dining room with its three picture windows that gave us views of the Grove that I shall never forget. No wonder every time I sit down to a meal wherever I am, I find myself looking for a window view to enjoy while I'm eating. Surely this room was one of the best additions to the house – I can't imagine the house without it. So many wonderful meals were shared here. We all remember our original places at the table. So many good conversations, stories told of Boy Scout trips, canoeing ventures, hiking tales, topics covered of music, handbell choir, chess games, jokes like ham sandwich and apple pie. And of course we discussed physics questions, satellite orbits, math puzzlers, the World Cup, and much more. No matter the question, Father, you always either had an answer or you knew how to look it up. And as we always said, if we haven't opened an encyclopedia book, the World Almanac, or some book in

the house, or if Father hasn't pulled out a sheet of scrap paper and a pen to explain something, then we haven't really shared a good (or long enough) meal.

But the dining room was much more than just a place to eat. The table held many a board game, card games, Jenkins, and many after dinner fun. It was also the sewing table, the homework table, the "figuring out stuff" table, the planning table, the sorting table, the Christmas letter mailings table. And we all remember that alongside the table, used to be Father's desk and office. How we fit all that in there, I don't know, but it worked for a time. Your desk, Father, made a great place to sit and watch the birds from the birdfeeder, which was, by far, the coolest birdfeeder! I think we all (including Mittens) learned to identify and appreciate the size and beauty of many birds (and squirrels) because of it. Your desk, Father, was also the place where my brothers played that trick on me with the tracing the quarter and then rolling it on my face, among other such brother-sister entertainment. But more fondly, I remember your presence at the desk, working hard, but always willing to stop a moment to tie my dress bow or even fix my broken necklace chain.

We are thankful for the old record player and all the records it played, from Tom Lehrer to *Fiddler on the Roof*, from *Godspell* to Peter, Paul, and Mary, from the *Nutcracker* to *Capellia* and all the classics from the *William Tell Overture* to Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* to Handel's *Messiah* and much more.

What a blessing it was to have the home full of music! Not only from the record player and the piano, but all the instruments we played. Thanks for all the music lessons and for bearing with all our different sounds and melodies emanating from nearly every room in the house, as we learned to play the notes. And thanks for teaching us to sing and share our music with others.

We thank you for a home with just the right number of bedrooms (I'm sure nine would have been too many to clean!) and the peaceful sleep they provided. The hallway was our meeting place for late night chats and giggles with siblings before turning into bed. Good memories I have of being tucked in at night and wished "boa noite" and "dorma bem". The sound of crickets still brings me back to times I would lay in bed with the windows open and listen to the amazing chorus of crickets pouring in from the Grove forest. Many of us can recount being awakened by an owl hooting in the distance. I was also very glad for an East-view window that let in the morning sun and bathed my room with warmth for a new day. Each bedroom had its unique features. Perhaps by now, nearly all of us have slept in the upstairs rooms at one time or another as the years have gone by and needs have changed. Thanks, Father and Mother, for accommodating us and our families so generously for so many of our adult years. In particular, my handsome hubby and I have enjoyed many relaxing nights in that cozy upstairs room – truly, a home away from home.

We had the luxury of three bathrooms with showers/baths, which certainly came in handy when we arrived back from our canoe trips, all wet and grimy from our river fun.

Up the stairs to the top floor we so often climbed (some of us more out of necessity than others). I learned early on to distinguish the sound of each person's footsteps up and down those stairs. And whenever the footsteps paused for a moment, it was likely that person was

stopping to browse through the vast collection of books on the shelves that lined those stairs. I think I even sat on those stairs for extended periods to read a good book I found on those shelves. The window that used to be at the top of the stairs was the place I remember we viewed the wonders of the stars and a lunar eclipse, I believe. The attic crawl space held our seasonal treasures – Christmas ornaments, Halloween costumes, and other various decorations and lights, plus suitcases, model train tracks, and things I've long forgotten.

The deck was another pretty cool addition, even if it wasn't used as often as we'd liked. It afforded us a higher and deeper view into the park and at night up closer (seemingly) to the stars. I enjoyed the option of going out there on occasion when I wanted to just have a look and get a new perspective on our yard (or to say 'hi!' to Mother, gently tending her garden below).

The basement certainly housed a number of activities down through the years. There's the rec room that served us well during rambunctious games such as Blind Man's Bluff or with hours of watching Star Trek, or playing Pong (things that Norm's kids will never understand). When the television was later moved, we enjoyed watching movies, World Cup soccer, and the National Symphony Orchestra on the Capital's lawn. But I'm thankful that our close-knit home life was never usurped by that captivating screen; it was used in good proportion to all else that we did.

The laundry room, though always used for laundry, was also later transformed into Mom's ceramic studio. What creative and beautiful pottery you created, Mom! Thanks for sharing your wonderful talent with us and even teaching some of your children and grandchildren how to 'throw' a pot!

The far room beyond the next door became your office for many years, Father. Thank you for working so diligently on countless problem-solving projects, papers, figures, charts, articles, letters ... and for taking the time to help me with so many of my calculus problems in school! Still today, the sound of a paper cutter brings back fond memories of your office, which had everything we needed for our own little projects – scrap paper, staple remover, carbon copy paper, graph paper, calculator, and later a copier too. And of course, we can't forget the Kaypro computer with its bright green letters ... oh and the typewriters, both the manual and electric. Two sounds I remember coming from your office: the sound of the typewriter and the opera music playing on the radio. Kids today will never know the mysterious beauty of those ancient sounds.

Probably the least favorite memory of the basement is the occasional flooding over the years; sometime, of course, it was *too* occasional to keep up with. We may never know the hours you spent, Father, dealing with a wet basement. Thank you for all your efforts in making it as dry as possible! Having just scraped and painted my own basement this summer, I REALLY learned to appreciate all the work it took for you to keep that darn basement dry!

Along the stairs up from the basement, were many of our jackets, the box of rags (very handy!), and the box of assorted mittens, scarves, and hats. Each of these winter necessities belonged to one of us, but was later shared and passed along to others, in good Gordon fashion. And, once upon a time, we had our cat, Mittens, and his food dish and water was by the door. In my mind's

eye, I can still hear the flapping sound of the doormat outside! Who's that? Why, it's Mittens, wanting to come in one last time.

The porch was another versatile room and a wonderful extension of our living space. In the summer, we ate many picnic-style meals with family and cousins all seated at our two picnic tables. Food was served and passed through that handy window from the kitchen. Thank you for creating such good mealtime memories that often culminated with the watermelon seed-spitting contests. Aside from an eating area, it was also the place we played ping-pong, even round-robin style at least once. But I also remember many quiet times of smaller gatherings, or listening to the birds, and the breeze, or the oncoming storms.

The backyard was a place of precious memories as well. It was the place we played baseball and soccer as kids. It was the place where Father set up a net for many a great volleyball game. Thank you for our entire yard which was the only yard on the block big enough it seemed for playing hide-and-go-seek – hours of fun!

Father, how can we thank you enough for the swimming pool which you so lovingly and skillfully (with a little of our help) put up each year, making sure all the leaks were patched. We certainly got our (your) money's worth, wouldn't you say? The whirlpool and "wave"-making definitely made it memorable! Only a physicist would have thought of that! This was our 'Westmoreland' swimming pool; smaller, yes, but exploding with memories!

And then, when the pool was gone, we enjoyed the lovely, colorful garden that was the fruit of Mom's patient labor where the pool used to be. How I enjoyed walking with you, Mom, to look over each of the plants you had planted in its place, trying to figure out what works and what doesn't as well as appreciating the uniqueness of each plant. It was a beautiful way of transforming the circular void left by the pool into a work of art!

And, Father, your creative and resourceful skills were what made the garage able to hold so much! How you fit two cars, three canoes and one kayak, plus numerous bikes inside (not to mention all the things stored in the garage attic) is truly a mark of ingenuity. Perhaps there was more in it than needed to be but at least you always kept the important things accessible – the cars, the bikes and the canoes! Those canoes were definitely one of the best investments you made for our family. I am so grateful for the skills we learned on the river, the adventures we shared, the sites we witnessed in nature, and the bonds our family formed while paddling those canoes. As a result, Voilet's Lock and Lunchstop Island became family traditions, creating stories we tell and retell even now.

And finally, some other memories of our yard: the roses that always used to bloom on Father's birthday (under my bedroom window), picnicking with Mom under the Japanese maple long ago, playing badminton with Father in the side yard, building miniature stick teepees with Norman, Alan's Christmas decorations up in the oak tree, the grass mowings (thanks to Father and all my brothers!) and the leaf burnings, the swing in the front yard, the round-seated wooden swing in the side yard, planting the Blackgum tree with Mom, Mittens welcoming us home, the 17-year locusts, all the snow shoveling and snowman making, the icicles, Donald's

bamboo, and the legendary fort!...and more recently, Dubside's exercise ropes! I'm sure there's more.

That front yard swing from the old oak tree will always hold a special memory for me. Thank you, Father, for building it. Thanks to my brothers (and later my Hubby) who swung me on it, and thanks, Mom, for letting me swing so high! It was the best!

Thank you, Father and Mother, for our HOME. Oak Manor, indeed, was the *best house* we could have possibly had for our family! But what made those memories of our home the *best* memories ... is the loving family that lived in it!

With much love and utmost gratitude,

Carol Sue

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#### Dubside's Contribution

Our deepest gratitude goes Dubside for his countless hours of dedication to helping Father and Mother clean out the house of all their belongings and holding the house together through the winter, and all the way to sale. Dubside masterfully oversaw the last official hauling day on Saturday as the McKinnons, the Donald Gordons, and the Norm Gordons all came under his management for several hours, or in some cases, the whole day, to get those last trips to the dump, Goodwill, used book store, and Norm's house, with the last of the last of the belongings. He did a great job. The closing is 10:00 a.m. this Friday, February 12, 2016, before which time Dubside himself, the last living vestige, will 'exit the building.'

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#### From Jonatas Gordon Silva

Soooo many great memories!!!

I'm glad I had the opportunity of being acquainted with that famous home address. Muito obrigado, Uncle Gary & Aunt Doris, and all of you (5) cousins for sharing with me your love, time, care, and that beautiful house while I lived there!

Much love,

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#### From Davi Gordon Silva

Thank you Caroço, way to go!!! You've got an excellent GPS built in, made me travel by each corner and room of that lovely house with an impressive amount of details. Thank you U Gary and A Doris for having us all with such hospitality. We're certainly different people today due to your love and kindness.

As for Oak Manor, I stand tall and say... I was there, and will never forget it.

Cheers,

Davi

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From Emily Cleaveland

Dear Carol and the Gordon cousins, Aunt Doris, and Uncle Gary,

I'm enjoying your reminisces and banter about the house at Washington Grove. Thank you so much, Carol, for including me in the thread. It was a privilege as the 2nd cousin to occupy one of the bedrooms for a time, but always a delight to visit there with cousins from across the nation and across the equator. I will miss its quiet solitude that punctuated an otherwise busy, crowded and sometimes stressful first years of my career working at the NIH in Bethesda. Carol's letter reminded me what a sanctuary it was, and what a wonderful place it must have been to grow up in.

Much love and blessings, Emily&Tom

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From Sandra Gordon Dodson

As to 400 Center Street, I always picture the glass-walled dining room when I see that address. The beautiful quiet to center oneself whatever life threw at me. It was in that room I got the two awesome phone calls one April: one accepting me into medical school, and the next asking if I wanted the job in Amsterdam for the summer--and NO ONE in the house to share the good news with at that moment, so I just looked out at the grove and sunshine and twirled and grinned. It was to that room I'd make a beeline every time I came "home," people who were always, always happy to see me. In that room, we ate, we played games, we discussed finances, we looked up new words and ideas, we looked at maps together for directions, and, my personal favorite, drank tea or coffee while just being together.....family.

415 Russell Ave, Apt 902 (Gary & Doris' address at Asbury) has a great view too....I can't wait to make more memories with my family. God bless us every one!

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From Sonia Gordon Dettweiler

Such wonderful memories of this wonderful home. 400 Center Street is the only address I will never forget and 301-926-8603 is the only phone number I will never forget. Thanks, Uncle Gary and Aunt Doris, for that strong "centeredness" you gave us by staying in the same place all those years! Thanks for taking us in during breaks from college. Thanks for always being happy to see us. Thanks for generously feeding us physically and spiritually. I wonder if the new owners will sense all the years of loving and caring that transpired in that house?

Sonia

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### Doris Describes the Closing

Dear All of you,

Yesterday Gary and I went to Bethesda, sat at the table with the closing official, the realtors, and the couple who are buying our house, and signed multiple papers, and waited for our check to be printed out. While waiting we had a welcome chance to get acquainted with the new owners of 400 Center St. They are an engaged couple in their fifties, I judged, soon to get married, he an engineer, she a communications instructor. They seem genuinely interested in the Grove (smile)! Gary gave them a short list of info about the house, to which, Carol, I added the name of the gum tree and its history and our hope that it would be preserved and cared for. They had already noticed the tree with interest (smile)! What they hope to do with the house I felt it was not our business to ask. I hope they will be good neighbors for our former ones. And so we leave things in God's hands.

Our hearts were wonderfully warmed by the several emails we have received expressing how much Oak Manor has meant to many of you. All those rich memories can't be lost with the sale of the house! We are so thankful that our years there were a blessing to our individual family and to the larger family and to any others who came through our doors, both friends and strangers. All of it made the house a real home! That welcoming that is being carried out in your own next generation homes is God's doing. We give thanks and glory to Him.

A very big thank you to all of you who gave us so much help in moving from the old house to our new dwelling place here at Asbury. We couldn't possibly have managed it without you!!!! We no longer have multiple bedrooms for overnight guests but a welcome sign is still at our door and in our hearts. We pray God's grace and peace for each of you in your own homes, be they new or not so new.

With very warm love, A. Doris