



Linda grows up during the 1950s and 1960s in a Jewish community. It feels like Utopia. Now, another culture changes what is cherished, secure, and navigable. Leaving helped Linda understand her culture in the larger world.

Particular Place and People

By Linda Fine Hunt

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Particular Place and People

Story and Truth



LINDA FINE HUNT

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Chapter 1: 1954 First Lesson

There is so much I want to tell. The story begins in 1954 when I was three years old and moved with my parents from an apartment on Kingsbury Boulevard in St. Louis City to a suburb called University City. We moved to a new development, a subdivision, and a new grade school, the third ward within the district in University City. The subdivision was called University Forest Estates. The ad in the newspaper used the word *estates*. Now, I think of estates as big houses on acres of land, just like the original mansion on this property. The hook of using the word estates was that these home buyers who became my neighbors lived in city apartments. Some lived with extended family members. Buying a house in this new subdivision was a chance to own property. A few of my new neighbors were immigrants who had to leave family and all their possessions in Europe to flee the Nazis. Some were newly married, and this was their first residence as a couple. To post-war Americans, the small houses and yards were estates. The homes were 1,200 square feet, and the lots were 5,001 square feet. Rather than a street, I remember it being called a block. “What block do you live on?” a schoolmate might ask.

“Hazelwood Lane,” I replied. The other blocks were Willow Tree Lane, White Oaks Lane, and Faris Lane. I know. Why Faris Lane? There is no Faris tree. It was an existing street named after the Faris family. Located on Faris Lane was a bright white stone mansion on a hill. It was behind my mansion. I will talk about my mansion later. At one time, the owners of these two mansions

were related, the Faris family and the Benoist family. They wanted to live near each other in country homes. I love history.

Meet my family. Our last name is Fine. That is important because we know who is Jewish by a person's last name. We take pride in our last name. Fine is such a cool name. There is even a song called "She's So Fine." Later in 1964, the Temptations recorded a song called "The Girl's Alright with Me." In it was the line, "She's so fine".

My dad is Hyman Fine. Everyone calls him Hy Fi, short for the High-Fidelity record player. He returned from World War II in 1945. When my parents bought this new house, Dad was about 44 years old. I say "about" because he did not know his birthday. It was in October, going by the Jewish calendar. The year may have been in question, too. For his birthday in America, he picked the middle of the month, October 15th.

I always liked Dad's stories. He smokes pipes and has a beautiful pipe collection. Outside of the house, on our porch, he smoked cigars. He was happy. About 37 years ago, he lived in a Lithuanian village where people tried to kill his family. His immediate family safely traveled to St. Louis. He learned English, graduated grade school, got a good paying job, married a beautiful woman, had two children, drove a Buick, and could sit in the evenings on a porch connected to a lovely house reading the newspaper and smoking his pipe or cigar. Dad was a beautiful whistler with blonde hair and powder-blue eyes.

Mom is more complicated. Her name is Bess. She grew up in St. Louis City, very poor. Her mother, Bertha, spent time gambling on the little money Grandpa Louis earned from painting houses and carpentry work. Grandma's addiction was horse races.

Grandpa's addiction was alcohol. Mom graduated from Soldan High School top of her class. She is a beauty with green eyes. Mom is big-breasted. Boys ask me if I was adopted. She was 35 years old when we moved to this new house. Mom came from a mean mom (I could tell stories) and thought the only way to escape was to marry.

During the war, Mom learned she could be self-sufficient. She explained, "I did not want to be married when your father came home from the war. I stayed. We had you and Gary. We lost our first child. I believed this house was a new beginning." I learned women might compromise their goals for a home, material gain, family, and guilt.

Mom loved to decorate and decorate she did. Dad agreed to all her ideas. Mom designed everything to be forever. The 100% wool carpet in the living room, the custom-made silk draperies, and a wall covered in grass cloth made our place beautiful. We had famous designer furniture now sought out by collectors.

Mom decided to have our house painted redwood. The green roof with redwood gave it a Western and modern feel. Most other houses were white. Mom hated conformity. I was proud of her. She was intelligent, fun, and she could sing. Most of the time, I preferred being with Mom instead of kids my age. We had interesting conversations. It might seem strange she chatted with me as if I was an adult, but that is how Mom and I conversed. My movie star Mom had beautiful red hair and never went outside without wearing lipstick, a tradition I carry on. I loved going through her scarves, makeup, and jewelry drawers.

My brother, Gary, is three years older than me. Picture him with dark brown hair and green eyes. He was the most beautiful

baby. I knew this from his baby pictures. We fought a lot. Yet he was my protector. He was rarely home. He had lots of friends.

He read comic books. He took mechanical gadgets apart and sometimes had trouble putting them back together. “He’s going to be an engineer,” Mom told everyone. If he misbehaved, my parents ordered him to his room. When this happened, he jumped out of his bedroom window and walked down the street to a friend’s house. I thought my brother should work for the FBI.

Gary was not into sports much except for ping-pong. He was a champion player. Our parents bought him a weight set. I started lifting these weights because I was so tiny. Gary could play the trumpet, and we attended numerous concerts at our brand-new school, University Forest Elementary School. Gary excelled in math. Why didn’t he help me with my math homework? He did teach me how to tie my shoes.

Gary made the best French fries because he left the potato skins on. It was a dangerous activity for kids at home, alone. I had crushes on some of his friends. Terry was my favorite. We played hide-and-go-seek at night. We ran around with lightning bugs or fireflies till our parents called us in. Our neighborhood was safe.

Me? I just turned sixteen. I decided to write about a particular place and people. In other words, I am writing about culture. Different environments fascinate me. Environments may determine who we become. Lucky for me, I grew up in University City, Missouri. This place supported my religion, education, and my dreams.

People describe me as impatient. She is “always on to the next activity.” I tell them I was born six weeks too soon and weighed three and a half pounds. I met the world early and tiny. I had a lot

to accomplish. For example, I wanted to write like Louisa May Alcott.

I am not a typical girl. Sure, I loved to dress up and look pretty. However, I prefer to wear boys' clothes. I raided Gary's closet for shirts and sweaters. I have long wavy blonde hair. My eye color is unique. It is called hazel, teal with gold. It is a rare color. I am too skinny. I will explain why later.

When I was younger, I collected books, dolls, coins, stamps, butterflies, rocks, and shells. I had crushes on a few boys. What was atypical was my independence at an early age. I questioned the rules. I told adults what I thought of them if I did not respect them. I defended myself. If I couldn't, I brought Mom into the battle. As I said, Mom and I spent a lot of time together. Mom should have told people, "My daughter is going to be a writer." She never did. She advised me I was going to be a secretary for a lawyer. "Then you will marry the lawyer."

We only had one car at first. Dad bought expensive Buicks. We even had a pink Buick at one time with fins. Our new house was close to everything. The grocery store was just a mile away. Mom and I walked to National Food Store, or we could walk a quarter of a mile to Page Boulevard and catch a bus to anywhere. My school was just a block away, on Partridge Avenue. The swimming pool at Heman Park was a mile walk. We walked to Pennsylvania Food Shop and bought penny candy. It was paradise. We had everything we needed. Later, Dad became instrumental in developing a Jewish War Veterans building on the corner of Partridge Avenue and Olive Street Road. I lived in a Jewish community. I knew nothing else.

The area was called University Forest. Yet, there were few trees. I later learned my subdivision was built on an orchard of various fruit trees. Giant oak trees and woods were just on the south side of my grade school. To the north, large trees surrounded my mansion. I call it “my mansion” because it was everything to me.

I preferred interesting places and adults. My first visit to my mansion was a little scary. I did not understand time, and I thought I might see dinosaurs. Mom explained dinosaurs lived long ago, and they were all dead. That made me feel safe walking over to my mansion. On the mansion grounds was an arbor bigger than my house. There was a playground with the best swings, beautiful gardens, and magical woods. The concrete reflecting pond was dry and in bad shape. Best of all was the limestone gazebo. Seeing the gazebo for the first time, I learned the word, charming. My mansion might have been 100 years old. Exploring my mansion and the grounds taught me the word, magnificent. I fell in love with this place.

Our subdivision was taking shape. The city planted oak trees along the streets. Our house stood out because it had a large pear tree in the corner of the backyard that bore fruit. Mom baked me a pear fruit pie once.

At first, all the houses sat in dirt; mud when it rained. No fences existed. It was my “oyster” (my mom quoting Shakespeare) where I learned the freedom of exploration and drove my desire to experience the world. At age three, I began walking through the neighbors’ backyards from my backyard. As I continued to walk through the backyards, the ground got muddy. Mud is typical at construction sites. I only made it to the second

backyard west of my house. What stopped me? I could no longer walk. I sank into the mud. I was stuck. I could not move. I was lucky I had not seen Westerns, the movies where men died sinking in quicksand. I was not afraid. I had choices. Crying would only get me a runny nose with tears down my face. Doing nothing left me at the mercy of someone accidentally finding me. Screaming my head off could get me the help I needed. I yelled for help. I learned action works. I made the right choice. Lucky for me, no one had air conditioning, though the builder mentioned air conditioning in the list of options.

Windows were open. Mrs. Farb heard me scream and came to my rescue. She lifted me out of the mud. We walked to the front of her house onto Hazelwood Lane. But I could not identify my home. We walked past the Garman's home, between the Farb's house and mine. Then I saw the pear tree behind our house. I recognized my home only by the location of the pear tree in the backyard. "That's my house." We walked to the back door through the screened porch. Mrs. Farb delivered me to my mom, covered in mud.

Upon seeing me, Mom exclaimed, "Thank God you are okay!" There was no mention of the ruined shoes. Mom was not stressed back then. Probably, I walked out of the house, unknown to her. That is what explorers do.

A few years after my first adventure, lightning struck the pear tree. The tree's trunk was black from the fire. It fell, and my parents removed it. I missed the pear tree. It was the first tree I loved. I argued that I wanted the branches to remain in our yard so I could climb on them. I lost. I now wish I saved a branch as a decoration for my bedroom.

Years later, I talked to Mrs. Farb's daughter, Susan, about this story. Susan related the story to her mom. "Yes, it did happen," Susan reported back to me. Mrs. Farb remembered rescuing me. "Please tell your mom thank you from me. Not only did she rescue me, but she also remembered my first memory."

I learned before exploring to make sure someone knows where I am going and report my return. Most importantly, I will thank those who helped me, even if it is years later.

Chapter 2: How We Got Here

Mom explained, “Dad and I were looking at new houses on Vernon Avenue in University City. The houses were tiny, nothing special, but we had outgrown our apartment on Kingsbury Boulevard. The developer, Sam Ladd, told us to visit his newest University City development. He called it a subdivision. He envisioned a community with a new school.” Mom added, “I thought this place would be perfect for Gary and you to grow up.”

Mom continued, “I later learned the shingle siding was asbestos. The houses in the new development would be brick, a better choice now we know so much about asbestos.” I did not want to change the subject by asking her about asbestos. I tried to keep the conversation happy. None of my friends seemed to have conversations with their moms. That may be why their moms liked me. I enjoyed talking with moms.

I believe this is what happened. Mr. Ladd looked at my mom, dressed in expensive clothes, high heels, and holding a genuine alligator leather purse. He decided to sell them a pricier house as they could afford it. Plus, Dad drove the expensive Buick to the site. Mr. Ladd could tell my parents knew excellence. I hear Mr. Ladd saying, “Wait just a bit and come see my new development in University City. It is called University Forest Estates.” His ads in the newspaper called it “the talk of the town.”

Taking Mr. Ladd’s advice, Mom and Dad bought our house on the south side of Hazelwood Lane in this new “talk of the town” subdivision. I asked Mom how she chose our lot. “It was

four lots away from the east end of Hazelwood Lane. The two corner lots, where the Brodskys and Marians lived, were oversized. Those backyards were visible from Partridge Avenue. I did not want people driving or walking down Partridge Avenue and looking into our backyard. We would have had to mow the side yard, which was not usable. It just added more space.” The Brodskys later built a brick wall around their backyard for privacy. There was a mansion, my mansion, just on the other side of our street, the north side. I could see it from my front lawn.

Our new house had mansions surrounding it. There were two mansions just north of our house and one just across the street from my school. This last one was now a Catholic orphan home. The orphan home limestone mansion had a history of a mean owner, Theodore Salorgne, Jr. Mom told me, “I heard he inherited his wealth from his French Catholic father, who owned a buggy-and-carriage business downtown. The son married a woman named Agnes. They had a daughter, Josephine. Theodore Salorgne, Jr. abused his wife. After a miscarriage, a son was born. The son loved to ride horses. He died in his twenties when he was thrown from a horse while jumping a fence. Those are the stories I heard.”

Mom could be a wealth of information. She continued, “Eventually, the Salorgne mansion was sold to German nuns, and the mansion became an orphanage.” Children feared this mansion. Parents threatened to take their children to the orphanage for misbehaving. The orphan home was right across the street from my new school, University Forest Elementary School, which only went to the third grade when we moved into our home. The school district added six more classrooms and a gym just in time to save

Gary from going to Hawthorne Elementary, which was not within walking distance.

We did not have to drive to St. Louis City, University Hills, or Lewis Park to see mansions. Mansions were right in our neighborhood. Land, trees, and places to explore surrounded the mansions near me. My friend Mark and I walked over to a mansion on Faris Lane. He surprised me with this mansion. Later, I learned the Faris family built this mansion. It was as old as my mansion and once shared a family connection. It glistened all shiny white stone in the sunlight. God could have lived there. I still believed my dark stone mansion was better. The Faris mansion was torn down around 1959 to build a new street called Nixon Avenue. Tiny houses lined Nixon Avenue and replaced grandeur. Later, Mark told me, “A Russian spy lives in one of these houses.”

“Were tiny houses going to replace all the mansions?” I asked Mark. He did not know. I feared for my mansion.

I could walk down this new street, Nixon Avenue, and see the carriage house of my mansion. I now regret I did not explore the Faris mansion more.



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