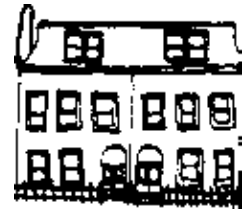


From Little House



by **Teka Childress and
Mike Baldwin**

As many of you probably already know, Mary Ann McGivern passed the Little House on to us when she left for the Big Apple a few years ago. "Little House" is a deceptive term for this 1870's four-family flat at the corner of 17th and Mullanphy (three blocks from Karen House).

We were a bit hesitant at first to accept this "gift" from Mary Ann because we certainly had enough going on already without taking on something new. Yet, it made perfect sense for us to do it because of my years of offering hospitality and Mike's years of involvement in every aspect of affordable housing. We knew that the low rents at the Little House did not cover all the expenses, but we decided to give it a go and



Downtown Teens, photo by Mike Baldwin

have managed so far, except that the big back porch is still in dilapidated condition due to lack of enough funds to build a new one.

Much to my surprise, not liking change, and not to Mike's surprise, who likes challenges, we have come to love our new home. We have a nice apartment, a beautiful backyard, and great neighbors.

Our backyard at North 18th Street, as anyone knows who had seen it, was worthy of envy because of Virginia Druhe's

years of care. I have been impressed to see how lovely Mike has made our new backyard. We also have the greatest advantage of all that Mary Ann left behind by her planting. I reached up and took an apricot off the tree in the back and literally reaped what I did not sow. But my favorite thing about the backyard is our new (to us) hammock. We had to take it down during the mulberry season, however, or risk coming in the house only a few shades off the demanding little girl who became a blueberry in "Willy Wonka."

Our neighbors include those who live in the other three apartments of our building, those on our block, and the residents who live in the new houses that have sprung up. Ms. Yvonne, who lives in our building, next door and downstairs, has five grandchildren who come to visit, especially on the weekends and summers. They add a great deal to the fun on our little block. Theresa, who lives below us, has been in the building for several years now and works for a home health care company. We saw her coming in the other night, the night before July 4th, and she was preparing for her work day on the following day, the holiday. She had to leave at 5 a. m. and expressed her doubt that the time and a half made it worth it. Above Ms. Yvonne, Jessica lives with her four girls who are a delight. They come to us from Karen House.

The block we live on has been the domain of the Bailey family for the past forty plus years. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey, who live in the house on the other end of our three-house block, invariably have one or more of their grandchildren living with them. Often in the summer, their grandson, Jeremy, lives with them and has worked with the Downtown Teens, the program that Mike runs to teach local teens job skills. In between the Baileys and us is our neighbor Payne. He is Mrs. Bailey's brother. He is the original scavenger. Anyone who has seen his house next to ours knows this. Nothing goes to waste under Payne's watchful eye.

Lastly, down the street on the next block, are our new neighbors. I am afraid I had some reverse snobbery going on and didn't expect to have much in common with these neighbors in these new suburban-style homes, but in walking down the street have come to like them a great deal. They have been friendly and open and interested in the neighborhood, wanting to become involved in building a good place to raise their children.

So, the moral of this story is, if someone offers you a house, you needn't necessarily be afraid to take it. Change doesn't always kill you and can bring some lovely new and unexpected aspects to your life.



Mike Baldwin and the Downtown Teens recently built a beautiful fence for Karen House, and **Teka Childress** has been busy fitting the Green Revolution into her bustling life and enjoying her homegrown lettuce and basil.