

“The Quiet in the Land” (“Die stille im lande”)

After moving from Oklahoma to California just before the end of World War II, I completed my childhood years in a small Central California town living on a quiet street within a block of our local denominational Church.

Our street was in a new development that opened in 1946. We were among the first on the street, but soon were joined by others, mostly from our church. Then the church, too, purchased a lot and built a parsonage. It was a comfortable street.

Even as a child, I knew that this development had some restrictions imposed by the owner-developer. Two Modesto Ash trees, for instance, had to be planted in every front yard with their location precisely indicated. There were other restrictions like this, but then there was one that was different. I later discovered it was restriction number 6. It said that no one could live on our street who was “Negro, Japanese, Hindu, Armenian, Malayan, native of the Turkish Empire, Mexican, Chinese, Korean, or any person not of the Caucasian race.” There was, however, one exception. One could employ such a person as a “servant.”

Furthermore, the “Declaration of Restrictions” said, no changes could be made to these restrictions for 25 years from December 4, 1946.

In church I had learned to sing:

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
All are precious in his sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Yet, most of the children of the world were excluded from my street. We said, though, that these children were our mission. Indeed, from the parsonage on our segregated street, within time, our pastor was called to become head of our denomination’s international mission program.

To make trouble was not our way, and so we lived quietly with what was given us. But before the 25 years were up, the Supreme Court ruled that segregated education was unconstitutional and Rosa Parks, in still another segregated part of the country, dared not to give up her bus seat, and our world began to change.

Decades later the doorbell rang in my home on still another street, now in an urban center in Central California. My neighbor was at the door with a petition in hand opposing a new low-cost housing development which was projected to be built directly behind our home. Fears of its impact on the neighborhood and potential lowered home values existed. Should I sign? Where will the poor find housing, if not here?

Dalton Reimer