

## MY FIRST HOME

# Wheeling and dealing

By Arlene Chaplin

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**I**t was 1978. I was a single parent of a 9-year-old son and living in an apartment in my childhood home in Watertown. With this arrangement came the company of my mother and sister for cups of tea and conversation as well as built-in sitters for social events and sore throat emergencies. It also came with city noise on a busy street and no place for kids to play safely.

My good friends repeatedly encouraged me to look for my own house, an intimidating idea given the circumstances. I tried getting used to it by choosing houses from the newspaper's real estate section and venturing out to look. I worried about whether I could afford a mortgage, how I would take care of a house on my own, and how we would survive if we moved away from our support systems.

But I had my dreams.

I wanted to live in a neighborhood where my son, Ben, could ride his bike on the street with his friends and where the school system had a solid rating. I wanted a place big enough for holiday dinners and for sleepovers for my nephews and niece — room for Ben and his cousins to build forts out of the sofa cushions and laugh until the wee hours of the morning.

As with most things in life, timing was a significant factor. Friends of friends were planning to sell and had not yet put their house on the market. We piled into the car on a day that rivaled the monsoons and drove to Newton Upper Falls. I saw the house just as we rounded the curve of the U-shaped street. It was a soft yellow with brown trim and had a screened-in porch. Fences stood between it and the small neighboring yards. I was sure this was it. The price was right, and I was already thinking about my mortgage application.

That was August. School would start in September, and I was operating on high alert. Mortgage papers in hand, I headed for my appointment

with the bank, dressed in my most conservative outfit. The '70s were not kind to divorced single women, and I was prepared for rejection. But the news was good: I was approved.

The owners extended gracious invitations to visit the house anytime. I measured the rooms, assessed whether I would need to do work, and roamed up and down the stairs, picturing where I would put my furniture. I could see beyond the gold shag carpet and the medallions on the

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wallpaper to the lovely natural woodwork throughout the house and the backyard big enough for a garden and a soccer net.

The papers would not be finalized until October, but I wanted my son to be in his new school at the beginning of the year. For a month, I drove from Watertown to Newton to drop him at school and then to work near Brookline, reversing the trip at the end of the day. My soon-to-be neighbors volunteered for after-school child care in the interim. We were already becoming part of the neighborhood.

I lived that dream for the next nine years and often sat on the white-wicker chair on the front porch, watching Ben and his friends do wheelies on their bikes and thinking that life was perfect.

*Arlene Chaplin is an artist and writer living in Sherborn. Send comments and a 550-word essay on your first home to [Address@globe.com](mailto:Address@globe.com). Please note: We do not respond to submissions we won't pursue.*



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