

from Roy D. Bell

Skinker-DeBaliviere, City and Neighbors Lose a Friend

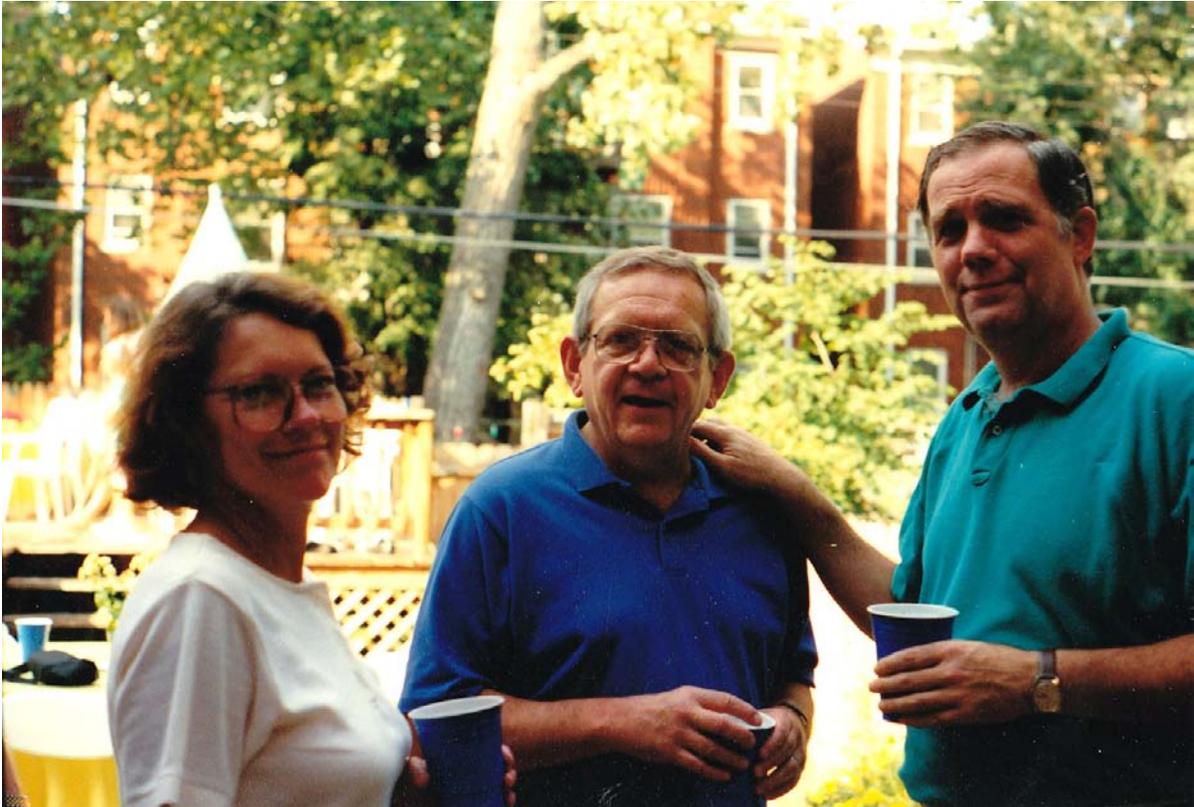
With the passing of Gee Stuart we lost a friend and supporter who was important and dear to us collectively and individually. When I think of Gee I always keep in mind that she began her career as a nurse. My mother was a nurse, and I know, secondhand, that it is not a career you enter looking for big bucks and glamour. You look after sick, and sometimes cranky, people and you do whatever you can to make their lives better. I think Gee took that same caring, nurturing ethic into everything she did and everyone she knew, including their dogs and cats.

There is that tired old cliché that, behind every successful man there is a strong, loving woman and I don't think her husband, Cal Stuart, long-time Executive Director of SDCC, would disagree that he was a better leader because of the support and counsel Gee provided. With their experience in the neighborhood and their private business, managing rental property in other city neighborhoods, she was the perfect candidate for Mayor Schoemehl to appoint as the director of Operation Impact. She understood that to have good, vibrant neighborhoods you need good landlords, homeowners and tenants whose children behave. At Operation Impact she used Federal block grant funds to help local neighborhood housing corporations deal with problem properties in their neighborhoods. I am sure some of those housing corporations succeeded and others had mixed results, but the fact that she continued in that position under four different mayors attests to the fact that she was successful.

Cal and Gee were fiercely loyal to the neighborhood and to the city. I don't know that they ever purchased anything in the County. They bought their groceries at the Schnucks on Arsenal. When we drove them home from poker at the Lawrenz' in DeSoto, they would point out the restaurants and meat markets they frequented, not to mention the places on the Hill where they now lived. And that loyalty showed in whatever gathering they attended. I don't know how many people they introduced me to with "this is so&so, they live on the XXXX block of **** and they are doing such and such there". It was a subtle form of community building. Like the prototypical St. Louis question of "Where did you go to High School?", she was saying "This is what they are doing to make Skinker-DeBaliviere a better place to live." They had a group of old friends that Cal always referred to as "The WestCo Group" because they all lived in West County. I got the impression, and it's only an impression, that the WestCo group only ventured into the "inner city", aka Skinker-DeBaliviere, out of loyalty to Cal and Gee and Cal and Gee only ventured into West County out of loyalty to their friends.

We all miss Gee. I am especially going to miss her at our monthly poker games, not the least of which was her appetite. Now that we are empty nesters cooking for two is a challenge, while cooking for eight is a pleasure. You would think that four Amighetti sized sandwiches would be enough to feed eight people but I would always figure on five sandwiches. After the night was over Pat and I would ask the same question: where does this tiny little woman put all that food? Truth be told, Gee wasn't a good poker player. Well, she was good when the card gods smiled on her but so are we all. She was, however, a very good gambler. In the early days of the poker club, when Gee's drink of choice was bourbon, as opposed to the latter days when her drink of choice was diet root beer, she would curl up on the couch once she lost her initial stake of 5\$ and nap till the game was finished. In the root beer period she would sit with us and watch as the less savvy gamblers continued to lose money. There is a lesson in there somewhere.

My roots in the neighborhood only go back to 1973 so I was not privy to the early dynamics and decisions that set Skinker-DeBaliviere on its upward course. I always considered Cal and Gee, along with so many others, as founders of the neighborhood. Now Gee has gone to join too many others and I hope we continue to honor their legacy.



Gee, Cal and Dan McGuire in earlier times.

from Kathy Harleman

When I remember Gee, the first thing that comes to mind is her smile, that smile that seemed to stretch from one high cheekbone to the other and made her eyes dance. My children remember a different side of Gee--very strict and demanding good manners. And, of course, they are right. Gee was very direct and had definite ideas about how things should be done, but that directness made her easy to work with for me. I never had to wonder what she was really thinking; she told me.

Another quality I liked was that Gee never gossiped to me, and she certainly could have because she had lots of information about what was going on in residents' lives. Gee was fierce in the love of her family. Cal, Sarah, C.T. and Allison were her first priorities. And who can forget the Catherine Bayer Memorial Microwave in the Kingsbury house named after her deceased mother? She was dedicated to doing excellent work. In the "early days" when she was a nurse, she would always forego alcohol and go home early from social events to get enough sleep if she had to work the next day. She said she didn't want anything to interfere with giving patients the best care.

I have a kaleidoscope of Gee images: Gee, the crossing guard; Gee, sneaking up to the Sinclair station to buy cigarettes before she "kicked the habit;" Gee in her high school formal at the neighborhood prom held at St. Roch's; Gee in Wisconsin; Gee at Innsbrook; Gee with her beagles. Oh, and did I mention---Gee smiling.

from Marjorie Weir

We all knew her as "Gee," but she was Georgiana inside – dignified, independent, reliable, determined, versatile, and lovely.

When she competed for Queen of the neighborhood's "Senior Prom," she took the prize. This contest was modeled on the Veiled Prophet selection process. Money was the deciding factor, and she collected the most! She probably had the most fun as well. She was a lovely Queen, as one can see in the picture.

She and I worked together as co-chairs of one of the House Tours that were part of the annual Mother's Day Art Fair. She really knew what she was doing, whereas I was the newbie. When, on the morning of Mother's Day, she found out that the residents of one of the featured homes had taken a notion to paint the walls the previous night, she didn't lose her cool. The mess was addressed and the tour went right on.

She started, built and ran her own property management business for a number of years. It was named McPherson Management for the street on which she and Cal had one of their homes. I worked for her for a few years as she built the business. No one could ask for a more attentive or conscientious manager.

She and Cal have been an essential part of our personal lives and certainly of the growth and success of the neighborhood. We are grateful.



Gee and her court: from left, front row, Kathleen Williams, Venita Lake, Gee, Susie Feinberg, top row, Elaine Moore, Marlene Mestres, Lu Green, Chris Lange.

from Sue Tepas

A REMEMBRANCE OF GEE STUART

I first met Gee in 1968, when my husband, Don, and I moved to McPherson Avenue. I'd been married for 9 years, had held a job, been to graduate school, and was now a faculty wife and political activist. In the next few years, we were adopting a baby boy and then a baby girl, and I was a doting mother. I thought I was a grown-up, sure as anything.

But Gee taught me that there was a lot more to being a grown-up. Not that she sat me down and lectured me, but she SHOWED me what I could possibly be. Organized (I thought I was, until the baby arrived), planning ahead, thinking of others and how to help them (while at the same time taking care of her own family's needs), knowing what she could do well (and doing it), NOT trying to do anything else unless she could give it her all, enjoying all the little things that so often pass us by without our knowing, and, most of all, having fun doing what she did. She could always find something funny about what we, or the kids, were doing. I remember laughing a lot, there on McPherson, often at myself or some situation we'd all gotten ourselves into.

I remember now what a great neighborhood that was, how we all tried to work together to make it better, and how hard we worked at it. And at the center were Cal and Gee Stuart, always doing just a little bit more, a little bit better, than most anybody could imagine.

My family and I remember Gee fondly: we exchanged kid-free mornings; she convinced her cleaning woman to work for me, too; we were in and out of each other's houses constantly, she was there in the ICU when I woke up after an emergency operation, to tell me I'd be OK. What more can you ask of a friend?

Sue Tepas
Mansfield Center, CT

from Karleen Hoerr

I think Gee was a great community leader and urban pioneer, a friend to all, what a pleasure to know her.

I remember when we had the first prom. We collected pennies to see who would be queen. It is possible she opened her kids piggy banks, she was going to win and she did. She was competitive in the best way. Both she and Cal made the difference in making our neighborhood what it is today. When Tom and I moved into the neighborhood she invited us in with open arms, we knew we were welcomed and it made a difference, I always wanted to be the woman she was.

She was a great racquet ball player and has the trophies to prove it. I still make her hot mustard and her green tomato relish.

from Jo Ann Vatcha

Cal and Gee Stuart have been such an important part of our neighborhood life and also in my work life. We bought our house due to the strong urgings of Cal as neighborhood director; I learned of all the smart women in the neighborhood, and, before I knew it, I was volunteering for the Art Fair (Gee must have recognized my abilities--she asked me to head up the "Sanitation Committee" and order the porta-potties.) Then she asked me to take notes at board meetings of West End Townhouse, and later to work for her at her business, McPherson Management, typing overdue rent notices and invoices for management fees, in between drop-offs at Grace Pre-School. After a couple of years, I returned to the full-time work force, but I continued my friendship with Gee. With both of us working in community development full time, it wasn't too long (only a decade) before the lines intersected again, and I was thrilled to once again have Gee as "boss" at Operation Impact, one of our progressive Mayor Vince's initiatives.

What a team we had! As our longtime financial manager Lorna put it in a fun piece she wrote called the "Flood of 93", "(that) job...was given to Operation Impact, which was a small group of development experts sometimes compared to a MASH unit. And, yes, if you thought about it, you could liken it to a medical emergency unit. The director of the unit was a registered nurse and the rest of the staff was SICK." Gee was one of the rare supervisors who was both very particular and still fun, a stickler for rules and the time clock, but always fair, even to the sometimes rough guys who managed construction projects. As one of her team, I worked with neighborhood organizations, with banks, with developers, trying to get projects underway to impact neighborhoods and make them as successful as SD. Gee made it exciting and challenging, and we accomplished a lot. Once I remember our team being in trouble with the director of CDA because we were "laughing too much". If you can lead a team in putting

millions of dollars into renovating houses and rebuilding neighborhoods and still be accused of having too much fun, you must be doing it right. That was because of Gee.

When Mayor Harmon (Gee's third mayor, after Schoemehl and Bosley and before Slay) moved some of our staff to the SLDC, those of us who were moved to CDA were upset--breaking up the team was hard. We were proud to see Gee become Director of Real Estate for the entire City, though, and we still worked together on many, many projects. Her new team at LRA were crazy about her, too.

In 1994, Cal and Gee moved to the Hill, and then-Alderman Dan McGuire honored them with a resolution, stating that "these outstanding citizens and public servants are ensconced forever in the mythology and history of the SD community as two of the key individuals responsible for the stabilization and renaissance of this culturally diverse and premier neighborhood."

In 2008, when the neighborhood celebrated its centennial, one of our goals was to republish the "yellow book" history of the neighborhood originally written by Gee, along with Sue Tepas and Kathy Harleman. Marj Weir and I set our sights on bringing the history up to the present and add pictures and text, which the TIMES published as CELEBRATING SD: HISTORY AND COMEBACK. We enjoyed seeing their work brought back to life, and more than a few of the photos in the book are of Cal and Gee and their feats. (See below.)

Through the years, Gee and I joined our gal pals to celebrated birthdays together. We saw our children who were school friends at St. Roch's grow up so well. With our couples' supper club, we enjoyed many dinners out (only at restaurants in the City). We were friends to the end, and I will always remember how well we worked --and played--together. How lucky Neville and I were to land in Skinker DeBaliviere, to meet Cal and Gee, and to know them as friends for over 40 years.



HAPPINESS IS . . . compiling a history of the neighborhood in which you live and having it published. That's what Mrs. Georgiana B. Stuart, (left), Mrs. Kathleen Harleman (center) and Mrs. Susan Tepas did in "The Neighborhood—A History of Skinker-DeBaliviere." (Post-Dispatch Photo)

History of Skinker-DeBaliviere Published By 3 Area Boosters