

When Kimi Gray moved to Kenilworth Courts in 1965, she was a young, divorced mother who didn't have much money. No one would have blamed her for letting her problems get her down. But Kimi was a dreamer, and deep inside she remembered something her grandmother used to say, "If I say a roach can pull a cart, then you hitch it up — and load the cart." So Kimi set out to prove her grandmother right by making some of her almost-impossible dreams come true.

First she went back to school and got a college education. After that, she noticed that some things weren't working right in the neighborhood, like the trash never seemed to get picked up on time, and she and her neighbors sometimes didn't have any heat or hot water. "Poor people are allowed the same dreams as everyone else," Kimi said to herself. Then she said it louder so that other people heard her, too, and they began working together to achieve their dream of a safe, well-kept, and happy neighborhood.

Neighbors elected Ms. Kimi, as she was called, president of the Resident Council, a group of leaders that worked to bring positive things to Kenilworth Courts. Ms. Kimi got to know nearly everyone in the neighborhood, and nearly everyone got to know Ms. Kimi, and she learned enough about the neighborhood and its people to start to see some answers to the problems they faced.

Kimi Gray

A Kenilworth Hero

In 1974 some teenagers came to Ms. Kimi and said, "We want to go to college, but we don't know how to get there." Very few people from Kenilworth Courts had ever gone to college. So Ms. Kimi helped them finish high school with good grades, celebrated their graduations, hooked them up with scholarships, took them to different colleges to see which ones they liked, made sure they got their applications in on time, then rode them to the bus station when it was time to go and made sure they could get back home for holidays.

Soon it took more people than Ms. Kimi to do all this, so she and some neighbors formed College Here We Come. They helped many more Kenilworth teenagers go to college, then had those students come back and help with the work to improve the community.

After awhile Ms. Kimi met Stuart Butler, a pretty smart guy who knew a lot about government and money. Even though she called him "a funny little man with a British accent," they became good friends. Mr. Butler introduced Ms. Kimi to some of his friends in Congress who could help her with her dream of improving Kenilworth. As it turned out, she helped those Congressmen a lot, too, telling them about how things in Kenilworth really worked and helping them get support for a change in the laws that would allow residents of places like Kenilworth Courts to run their own neighborhoods.

Soon Ms. Kimi and other Kenilworth residents had formed the Kenilworth-Parkside Resident Management Corporation, or KPRMC. Together they began to manage Kenilworth themselves. They collected rent, made sure the trash got picked up on time, and fixed the boilers to get the heat and hot water back on. And you can believe they fixed those boilers quick, because they didn't have any heat or hot water in their own houses, just like everyone else, if the boilers stayed broke! They helped some people find jobs, too, and helped others stop using drugs. Together with the police, they chased away the bad guys that had been making some people afraid to go outside.

But Ms. Kimi didn't stop there. She dreamed of even bigger things. With the help of her friends in the government, she convinced the city to let the residents of Kenilworth Courts not only run the neighborhood, but own it as well. Since some of the buildings were getting old, she found money to fix the whole place up, and she started making plans to build more houses for seniors and to start some stores and other businesses in the neighborhood.

Sadly, Ms. Kimi died in March of 2000. Not all her dreams came true, but the ones that did helped many people in Kenilworth have a better life and a prouder future. So if the problems that you face are getting you down, remember to hitch the roach to the cart — and load the cart!



Elmer and Fannie Lapp

Kenilworth Heroes

Elmer and Fannie Lapp were both born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the 1930's. Lancaster County is Amish country, where some people still ride in horse-drawn buggies instead of cars and use gas lanterns instead of electric lights. Though they grew up with cars and electricity, both Elmer and Fannie were Amish-Mennonites who believed in living a simple lifestyle, loving God, and obeying the Bible.

Elmer grew up on a dairy farm and put in long hours milking cows and driving a tractor through the fields. Later he was a lumberjack and felled big trees to make boards for houses. Fannie's parents were truck farmers. They grew vegetables on their country place and then took them into the city to sell them at markets. When Fannie was a teenager she went to work in Lancaster City for a rich lady named Mrs. Binz. She learned all about cooking and about city life, and she decided she liked it there.

Elmer and Fannie went to the same church, Weavertown Mennonite. When they were sixteen, they started doing activities with the church youth group, like having Bible studies and going to hymn sings at their friends' houses. They started to date each other and got married in 1957. At their wedding the preachers preached in both German and English, since people understood both languages. Their reception was in a local fire hall and they and their families made all the food.

After they were married they felt that God wanted them to help other people. In 1965 they moved to the big city, Washington DC, to Kenilworth, a neighborhood much different than their country farms. They learned, though, that people were the same in the city as in the country, and they found many good friends among their neighbors on Douglas Street and in Kenilworth.

Soon they began having Bible classes and craft classes for the girls and boys that lived around them, who loved to come and hear the Bible stories and get a snack at the end.

After awhile they started a church called Fellowship Haven. Other young people from Elmer and Fannie's home church in Pennsylvania who wanted to share God's love with Kenilworth came and helped with the classes, and soon with two weeks of summer Bible school and two weeks of summer camp.

Elmer became a pastor for the church and kept busy helping people in the neighborhood and the church. Fannie was soon a mother of five children. She helped her husband in his church work and was a good mother to her two boys and three girls.

The Lapp family kept in close contact with their family and friends in Lancaster. As Elmer and Fannie's own parents got older, they decided to move back to Pennsylvania to honor their parents and help them with their lives. When they returned to live in Kenilworth, their friends in the neighborhood and at the church were glad to see them back. They spent the next sixteen years in Kenilworth, helping families and children in the neighborhood love each other better and love God better.

In 2001 Elmer and Fannie retired and moved back to Pennsylvania, their home place, for good. They miss Kenilworth, though, and the people they know in Washington, DC. So the next time you want to travel, go to Lancaster County to see the horse and buggies and the beautiful countryside, and if you stop by the Lapp's house maybe you'll get a Bible story and a snack!



Elmer and Fannie Lapp (left) with Douglas Street neighbors.

Written by Joe Lapp

Do you know a Kenilworth hero? Tell Joe Lapp about them or write to him at lappjoe@yahoo.com.

Walter McDowney

A Kenilworth Hero

Walter McDowney was born in Poolesville, Maryland. When he was nine, his family was one of the first families to move into the Kenilworth Courts neighborhood. He and his brothers loved their new place. Their family had to share a bathroom with other families where they lived before, but here they had their own bathroom and a brand new kitchen. Plus, there was the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens to play in, just across the street.

Walter loved animals and nature. For awhile he and his brothers kept a squirrel in the house. They called him "Speedy." Walter also liked snakes and kept five of them in his room. When his mother found out, she said, "Either the snakes have to go or you have to go," so he put them back outside where they belonged.

Walter and his brothers had lots of fun in Kenilworth. Sometimes they baked cakes and sold them to make money. Other times they went swimming or fishing in the river, then fried the fish and ate them. They often went to the Kenilworth Dump (which was where the recreation center and swimming pool are now) and poked around in the trash to find toys or money. When the people at the dump started trying to keep them out, they found an old concrete mixing pan, took it back to the river, and used it as a boat to float down to the dump without being seen.

When Walter was a teenager he got a summer job down at the lily ponds, as he called the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. He knew the place well since he had played there all his life, and soon he was giving tours to visitors. The park rangers liked him so much that they wanted him to come back. With the help of Mrs. Davis, a lady from nearby Eastland Gardens, he got a full time job as a ranger at the park.



National Park Service photo by William Clark, archives of Rhuedine Davis

Walter loved the park so much that he wanted to share it with neighborhood children. He and Mrs. Davis started a Junior Ranger program that taught kids all about the frogs and snakes and lilies in the ponds and the marsh.

Walter's love for the park also made him want to protect it. When people came to steal things and mess up the park, Walter found out who they were and told park officials. Even though he thought some people might dislike him for his stand, he knew protecting the park was the right thing to do.

Lots of people thought Walter was doing a great job in the park, and he received an award for being the best park ranger in the whole United States. It was called the Freeman Tilden Award. He was the first black person to win this honor.

Now Walter works in Great Falls Park in Virginia and helps people enjoy the beautiful Potomac River, but he always has a special place in his heart for the Anacostia River and its lily ponds in the Kenilworth neighborhood.

Written by Joe Lapp

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