

THE CONCRETE KINGDOM

By Eddie Dee

I remember that it was very cold that winter. I believe it was shortly after that terrible Sunday in early December when the War started. My father told us that we were going to move to a new apartment that had steam heat. My brother and I were sad because we thought we would lose our friends. My sisters were too young to be worried. My mother and father both said that the new apartment would not be that far away and that we could stay in the same school if we didn't mind a little further walk to school each day. We didn't mind because we could keep our friends.

We lived in what you called a cold water railroad flat with a large black stove in the kitchen and a small brown kerosene oil stove in the living room. The bedrooms ran between the kitchen and the living room so that the whole apartment resembled lined up railroad cars. One of my jobs was to see to it that there was always kerosene in the small brown tank of the oil stove. Even with two stoves that apartment was always cold in the winter. I remember it feeling especially cold when I would have to empty the garbage into the metal garbage cans at the end of our alley.

A few weeks after Christmas, my mother told me to meet my brother after school and walk to our new address—43 Mulford Gardens—Apartment 2A. My brother had something to do with his friends after school— maybe practice with the school Fife and Drum Corps—so I was on my own. I headed down through the park,

In 1939 Mulford Gardens became the first public housing built in Yonkers. It also was the first to have its mortgage paid off. The buildings of Mulford Gardens are so-called "low-rise" housing, unlike the "high-rise" construction that came to Yonkers in later years. It dramatically transformed the area it dominates from the hillside above St. Joseph's Church on Ashburton Avenue.

Mulford Gardens also had a dramatic and lasting impact on the people who lived in it. Some of the men and women whose childhood was spent at Mulford Gardens came together last year for a 50-year reunion. That event prompted us to focus on this important part of Yonkers' history spanning the last 60 years.

Eddie Dee, newest member of our editorial team and who last year gave us his memories of Getty Square — "The Village," moved into Mulford Gardens as a 9-year-old in 1941. He recounts his childhood memories of "The Concrete Kingdom."

The "other" Ed Dee, who also spent his childhood in Mulford Gardens, is the author of four critically-praised novels whose protagonist is an NYPD Detective from Yonkers. Ed took part in the reunion and shares his memories of "The Boys of Mulford Gardens." We welcome him to Yonkers History and hope he will join us often.

Before Mulford Gardens the neighborhood played an important role in the history of Yonkers. Tom Flynn tells the story of the years leading up to the May, 1939, groundbreaking.

passed our old house and went two more blocks until I came to High Street. From where I stood, I looked downward and perceived The Concrete Kingdom. What I saw was a new Housing Project which spread out and expanded over a section we knew as St. Joseph's Hill. There were numerous four storied brick buildings and endless concrete stairways, sidewalks and pathways connecting the complexes side by side. From my perch on High Street and in the mind's eye of a 9 year old, everything I saw was brand new, spotless, powerfully solid and in perfect symmetry. To me it had the feeling of an indestructible fortress.

As the buildings were numbered sequentially from top row to bottom, I had little difficulty locating Number 43 at the foot of the hill near Whelan Place.

In a sense of excitement, I hustled up to the second floor landing in pursuit of Apartment 2A. I observed that the interior stairs and hand rails were as solid as the exterior brick and concrete facade. The first door on the right which

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