



# Growing up in Takoma Park

## The Seasons of Childhood

**D**ifferent generations have their own set of memories of growing up in Takoma Park. Kids today can barely imagine a world without computers, TVs and iPods to occupy their time, but Takoma Park in years past provide plenty of opportunities for boys and girls to seek adventure.

### Bob Jarboe

Bob Jarboe was twelve in 1948, one of five Jarboe boys growing up on Grant just up from Maple. In those days, the library site was a grassy field, and his best friend Gordon Paul lived in one of two house that once stood where the Community Center does now

According to Bob, winters brought much more snow in those days, Lots of snow in December and January, “ten inches at a time.” He recalls that it was possible to sled from Carroll Avenue, down Willow all the way to Maple and if you were lucky, make the turn onto Philadelphia.

When Gordon recently sent him an old photograph, it prompted Bob to reflect on the experiences of those long-ago days  
Bob’s story:

*“Of interest to me was the photo which was taken by Gordon’s brother Ted, circa mid-winter 1948. Although the area has since dramatically changed, there are still fond memories connected to those bygone days.*

*The view in the photograph was taken from a wooden bridge, which passed over a small creek that connected the Paul family’s front yard to Maple Avenue. The scene looks toward the storm drain emptying point, at the intersection of Philadelphia and Maple Avenues.*

*A seasonal snowfall has blanketed the creek area from being seen. However, beneath it all, lies a place in time. It gave some of us then youngsters an opportunity to explore nature’s effects upon the local environment.*

*As the seasons changed, we spent days at the creek with friends, enjoying the adventures of imagination and creativity, building dams, or making rafts to carry us in the sometimes swollen waters (up to 4-5 feet following heavy rains!), are vivid memories of our early years.*

*We would build rafts from old orange crates and lash them together with rope. Then, we would attach two-discarded 2.5-gallon lightweight metal containers (with sealed-in air) to help float the raft and to support our weight. It always worked! But, we only used the rafts in the still, deep water.*

*We would leap from the large rocks into the water and even do some swimming. I can’t recall as ever having been forbidden from bathing in the deepest portion of the*



Picture taken from bridge to 270 Maple Ave. , Takoma Park, MD

The Takoma Park Community Center now occupies this site.

PHOTO: TED PAUL

*then termed “big hole,” but, I think some of our parents had a degree of reservation about the subject.*

*Occasionally, the water at the proximity of the “big hole” reached a depth of almost 5 feet. That’s pretty deep when you consider that most of us were no taller than 4.5 to 5 feet! We also used to walk, wade and rock-hop the distance of the creek from where it originated winding down and paralleling to Maple Avenue for about ½ mile to where it then dumped into Sligo Creek. There too, are tales of us venturing into and through the underground storm drains. We sometimes walked upright, and other times we may be down on one knee as we worked our way through the drains, heading in the direction of Silver Spring. That was a mile or more north of the city! Yes, we used to travel underground! We survived and were able to “enjoy” those experiences that sometimes lasted from four to five hours. Usually, we would travel in a small group of 3 to 4 guys. Although the longer treks were very rare indeed,*

*I will admit that there were times when I got a bit scared and was happy to get back home to the comfort of my family and friends.*

*What I have just described is, to me, a truly peaceful, wintry snapshot of what used to be. Today, it is more challenging to find similar views and signs of undisturbed serenity and innocent fun to occupy our free time.”*

In conversation with Bob he recalled that Saturdays were often devoted to the movies: “We would walk over to Takoma Theater [on Fourth and Cedar past the railroad tracks].

The movie started about 10:30 or 11 in the morning. It cost 25 cents to get in and for another 35 cents you could buy popcorn and a drink.

First there was a cartoon and then a serial followed by the feature, sometimes a double feature. Then in the afternoon, we’d hike along the railroad tracks to Silver Spring and go the Seco Theater and catch the afternoon show.”

Sports were big too, especially since nearly every house said several boys to contribute. They played football on the triangular field that sits in the middle of Philadelphia.

The games were organized by the Boy’s Club. In those days the black kids and the white kids had their own teams and played in different leagues. “Sometimes we played each other, like on Fourth of July.”

Fourth of July conjured up a memory of the time they built a boxing ring on the float and he and another kid put on oversized boxing gloves and climbed into the ring and pretended to box. “I wish I had a

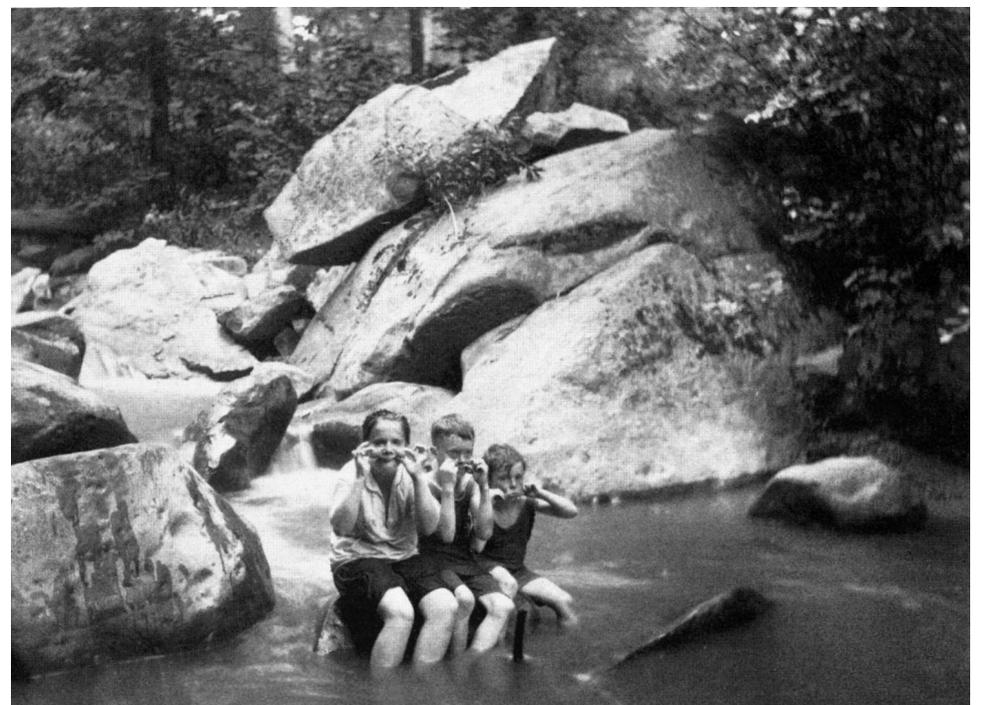


PHOTO: COURTESY OF HISTORIC TAKOMA

This isn’t Bob Jarboe enjoying Sligo Creek, but he spent days just like this.

photo of that day.”

### Dorothy Barnes

Fourth of July is a common thread growing up in Takoma Park. Dorothy Barnes, growing up slightly earlier than Bob - in the era between the wars - has fond memories of dressing up in costume for the parade and walking alongside the floats along Carroll Avenue. Pioneers one year, they would be nurses the next.

She still lives in the same house on Elm Avenue that she grew up in. Summer meant hours running up to Spring Park, savoring the cold spring water and using the deck of the springhouse for their imaginary games.

When winter dropped heavy snows, “our parents would barricade Elm Avenue. It was a perfect slope for sledding. There were bonfires and hot chocolate to warm us up.”

She agrees that it doesn't snow nearly as much now as it did then. “Kids now don't have much chance for sledding and snowball fights.”

*Bob Jarboe and his family has long been associated with the Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department. His brother Jim is the current fire chief. Dorothy Barnes is the resident historian of Historic Takoma and serves as a fount of knowledge about all things Takoma Park.*



### Share your memories with Historic Takoma.

Historic Takoma has an extensive collection of photographs and documents that tell the history of this community. We encourage anyone who grew up here to share their stories of their childhood with us. We are especially interested in photographs like the one Bob Jarboe provided for this article. Diana Kohn can be reached through the Voice, or by email ([dianakohn@erols.com](mailto:dianakohn@erols.com)) or check out [www.historictakoma.org](http://www.historictakoma.org).

*Diana Kohn is education chair of Historic Takoma, and is available for walking tours.*

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