

STEPPING INTO ANOTHER WORLD

featuring Naomi Angell

Lawyer Naomi Angell lives on the Suburb with her husband Gerald. Here she tells us about how she sees the law and the Suburb as having changed over the years.

I began by asking Naomi about her early years on the Suburb. "When we first moved into the Suburb following our marriage in 1975, I was working in the radical environment of an inner London law centre, active in the women's movement and had been living in a much more urban setting.

"My move to the Suburb was a step into another world. I had not changed my surname on marriage and the rumour had got round our street that my husband and I were living 'out of wedlock'."

Once that little local difficulty had been sorted out, Naomi and her husband Gerald – a lawyer too – thrived in their new life on the Suburb. They lived first in Denman Drive South and then – as their family increased – they outgrew their cottage and made the long journey to their present home in Woodside, one street away, where they still live.

In her first job after qualifying she worked at a law firm close to Chiswick Women's Aid – the first women's refuge – and dealt with the early cases of domestic violence when it was little recognised as a problem at all or one that cut across the class barriers. Then she moved on to law centres dealing with housing, immigration, discrimination and children's cases and it was in children's law that she decided to specialise.

During the International Year of the Child she set up the Children's Legal Centre, a national organisation representing the rights and voices of children in decisions being made about them. Since then she has worked in private law firms specialising in child protection and domestic and international adoption.

She has seen the landscape change with domestic adoption finally being recognised as a vital opportunity for children in care who need a family to give them the love and security they have lacked. Families were encouraged to step forward to adopt and, on the international scene, children were rescued by adoptive families from appalling Romanian children's homes. Then came the sharp rise and sudden fall of adoptions of abandoned baby girls from China.

Now, as joint chair of the Family Law Committee of the Law Society of England and Wales dealing with the major policy issues in this field, she sees how society has evolved since she first started out as a children's lawyer. The 'typical' family now regularly encompasses step-children, adopted and foster children, children born by surrogacy or being brought up by gay parents.

"It has been a fascinating career that I still love," says Naomi. "It's a job that's different every day – different problems, different challenges. I hope I have been able to make a difference. My stubbornness will keep me on the battlefield."

But she fears for the future with the Government's changes to the legal aid system. "I went into law in the 1970s to try to bring equal access to justice to all, regardless of background or disadvantage," says Naomi. "We saw great improvements with the expansion of legal aid, the establishment of law centres in many needy parts of the country and better legal protection for the marginalised and disenfranchised.

"But my greatest current concern is that, with the effective death of legal aid at the beginning of this April, many will not be able to go to law unless they represent themselves in court as there will be no legal aid to help them. Legal rights are of little use without the ability to enforce them.

"It seems that access to justice has gone full circle during my legal career and much of what I and many like me have fought for and defended has now been dismantled. In the short term, cuts will be achieved but the long-term cost to society will be inestimable."

The law may be changing, but has the Suburb been able to resist the march of time?

"I learnt what a wonderful place the Suburb is for families to grow up. Our three children flourished here. They all went to the Garden Suburb School and my husband was Chairman of the Governors there for 10 years. I am now a governor of Christ's College School, where one of our sons went, and where many Suburb boys go to from the two primary schools."

Always energetic and keen to get involved, Naomi and two other mothers of toddlers set up the playgroup in Lyttleton Playing Fields which ran for many years. She is a familiar figure on Hampstead Heath with Flo, her chocolate Labrador, who is often seen sitting patiently waiting for her outside Suburb coffee bars or watching her play tennis at Farm Walk. She is also a committed member of a Suburb book and dining group drawn mainly from mothers of her daughter's year group at Child's Way School,

And where would she leave her mark? "My favourite view, and where I would choose to have my bench, is on the Lower Heath looking down on the spires of St Jude's and the Free Church."



Naomi Angell relaxes at home in Woodside

Naomi and Gerald have seen how the Suburb has evolved over the past 37 years. Has it changed for the better?

"When we moved here there were still original residents who had moved to the Suburb in its early years sharing the ideology of its founders," she said.

"Our next door neighbour in Denman Drive South, for example, was Dora Jewel who, with her sister, had lived in Denman Drive when the house was built. They had been members of the Bloomsbury set and good friends with L.S. Lowry.

"The Suburb is now a very different place but its essential charm has remained." **S**

Attractive front gardens, continuous hedging and mature trees give the Suburb a special quality that sets it apart from other areas

However, many residents are keen to accommodate parking in their front gardens. If you wish to create a new hardstanding or enlarge an existing one you will need the consent of the Trust. The following guidance is useful when drawing up your plans.



In some cases, a hardstanding will not be approved. A small front garden such as this would be unsuitable because it would result in the loss of most of the planting and the car would be parked directly in front of the house.



A high quality paved surface in stone or brick looks best. Two lines of hard paving underneath the car tyres was the traditional method and has a minimal impact on the garden. Fully paved hardstandings may be approved if the design and appearance is in keeping with the house.



It is best to create a visual separation between the drive and path to the front door by retaining a strip of planting between the two. This was the normal treatment for original driveways and this also helps with rainwater run-off.



Too much paving will seriously detract from the setting of your house and the appearance of the street.

Further guidance on hardstandings can be found on the Trust's website at www.hgstrust.org/planning/designguide/designguidance.pdf

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