

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **You'll have to speak up**

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I miss the good old days of the 1980s and '90s, when the too-frequent barking of a dog or the whine of yard service leaf blowers was considered the height of noise pollution in my neighborhood. For the last decade, these sounds have been eclipsed by the seemingly constant noise of construction going on around me.

The bash-n-build craze is still going strong in my downcounty community. McMansions are popping up like acne on a pubescent teenager. Over the past ten years, seven of the behemoths have been erected within a one block radius of my home, and major additions were built on another four houses. Construction is currently underway on two more bash-n-builds in the same one block area. And "the gallows", the triangular wooden frame holding the circuit box for electric power used during construction, have just gone up on another three properties, indicating that the festival of noise will continue for some time.

I live in an edge neighborhood just west of downtown Bethesda, so during the past decade two commercial buildings were also constructed within a block of my home. There has only been a six month period from 2001 to the present when my neighbors and I have not lived in a construction zone with the accompanying rumble of trucks and the dust they kick up, the hammering of boards, pounding of roof shingles, the sawing, and stonecutting with the clouds of dust that it generates.

Layered on top of this constant barrage of construction is the occasional dump truck and digging to replace a broken water main (it's happened twice in one year on my block), or this month's aural assault of a pneumatic drill breaking up the street so crews can replace the aging natural gas line. Then of course last summer there was the sidewalk construction. Or was that the summer before last? Time seems to slip by, and one day blends into the next, when each and every day there is this nearly constant cacophony of noise.

I think my neighbors and I now understand how prisoners of war can be broken by the incessant playing of loud music. The sound literally jars the nerves of the body, as do the vibrations felt from home demolition or foundation digging that precedes new construction. Our sleep patterns have been disrupted. There is no such thing as having a quiet cup of coffee on a summer morning while listening to the birds, since the noise starts at 7 a.m. And there is no longer the possibility of sitting on one's screened porch after work and reflecting quietly on the day's accomplishments, since the noise continues until 7 p.m. on six or seven days a week.

I miss the days of old when a big truck rumbling up our block into the neighborhood was an occasion for kids to run outside and watch, since it usually meant some driver had taken a wrong turn while attempting to make deliveries to a nearby store in Bethesda. Folks would chuckle when an unfortunate big rig driver would be forced to back out of a block where residents' parked cars blocked his way down our narrow residential roads, and we'd place informal bets on whether the trucks would break low hanging limbs off the trees that lined the streets.

Nowadays the rumble of a truck down our roads usually means another bash-n-build is replacing one of the community's original homes. It's odd to me how many of the folks moving in the new McMansions tell us old timers that they chose to move to our neighborhood because of the wide swaths of grassy lawns and the big, mature trees that shade the homes and reduce the temperature on hot summer days. It's odd because that is what these newcomers get to see from their homes--our lawns and our trees. But our view is of their new homes covering two to three times the footprint of our older homes, with little lawn left and all the trees cut down prior to construction.

I miss the Bethesda that I knew as a kid, where we used to catch crayfish in the stream down at the end of our street. Three blocks away, a neighbor kept three sheep on his large lot because he thought lawnmowers were too darned noisy. And if you listened carefully you could hear the two horses neighing on the property next to the one with the sheep.

I wonder what the kids of today will remember fondly about the Bethesda in which they are growing up. Of course many of them don't dare venture out of their climate controlled homes. So I also miss the sound of kids playing, yelling during a game of kick ball on the corner or laughing during a game of tag or hopscotch. Most of all, I hope the sounds of construction will soon cease in my neighborhood so that those of us who want to can listen to the sounds of nature all around us: the buzz of the cicadas, the melody of bird songs, the chirping of crickets and, best of all, the sound of silence. And if that makes me an old fart, then so be it.

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [theelms518@earthlink.net](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*