



*Courtesy of Jerry Berg*

## Long Live the Alley

*By Judy Perszyk*

I love our alley. It feels good to drive down it and pull into the parking space beside our old garage, it means I'm home. We see our neighbors there often as we unload groceries, wash cars, light up our grill or do yard work. Our alley is where we have come to know our neighbors and their families and is where we have built valuable and hopefully lifelong friendships. We meet new people as they walk down our alley to the store. We see smiling kids on their bicycles, and folks walking dogs. We see the seasons change. Spring brings daffodils sprouting by the big old tree, climbing roses blooming on the old chain link fence, and sweet peas trailing up an old clothesline. Summer brings the ever vibrant daylilies and the prolific 4 o'clocks blooming behind quaint old garages. Fall brings a colorful and crunchy blanket of leaves and pecans, and winter...well winter usually just brings the hopes of spring, but to me our alley always seems to be alive.

A 1928 Ladies Home Journal article on Planned Neighborhoods proclaims "the alley has passed out of fashion in most new residential districts, and is practically unknown in most suburban sections." All good things must come to an end I suppose. So how lucky are we? I believe in our historic district we should consider our network of alleys "districts within a district." Our alleyscapes are made up of unique sheds, carports, garages and secondary structures that enhance the historic and architectural fabric of our neighborhood. When it comes to the historic preservation of our district we need to think beyond the house itself.

Often an alley will tell the observer a great deal about the neighborhood and the people who live there. Take a walk through your alley. What do you see? Is it clean and well kept? Can you see the significant potential, or at least an opportunity? There are today in America more than a few historic communities who have seen the unique potential alleys offer and created Alley Tours, much like Garden Tours. Many Community Watch programs are now sponsoring Alley Garden Awards. It seems that clean and cared for alleys actually discourage crime. Alley gardens show you care about your property—weeds, trash and buildings that are in disrepair are a signal to criminals that you don't care and aren't watching. Don't we want to send a different signal?

This spring as we survey our yards and gardens let's walk the few steps beyond our homes and look in our alley. A few perennials here, some plants there and a fresh coat of paint on the old garage might just do the trick, and make a difference in the aesthetics and safety of your property and of our neighborhood.

Alleys aren't invisible, they're wonderful!