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Travel Writing

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If Turnleaf Lane Could Talk

There is nothing better than for a child to grow up surrounded by friends that become family. Whether this is through being immersed in sports teams, school, clubs, or other extracurriculars, a child should start to form friendships at a young age. I was lucky enough that I did not have to go far for this immersion. 12 kids including me, who had nothing in common at first other than a shared zip code, now call each other family.

13 houses reside in Cameo Woods, a neighborhood at the end of a road in Tustin, California. In 1999, my parents were newly married and in search of buying a home. This house was recently built and they loved it, but it was way out of their price range, way too big for two people, and way too far from where they were planning on settling down. But my mom could not walk away and convinced my dad to take a leap of faith on this new place. Begrudgingly my dad was persuaded. The main selling point being that the house was at the end of a cul-de-sac in a small neighborhood, so he was looking forward to some peace and quiet. Little did they know this circle would be the furthest thing from silent. My brothers and I spent more time with our neighbors than our parents, and the majority of this time was spent at the end of the street, right in front of my house.

With our local elementary school being half a mile away, the five of us kids enrolled at the same time would meet in the cul-de-sac to take the bright yellow golf cart down the side streets straight to our classrooms. The yellow coloring eventually became unrecognizable over the years as every sticker or drawing imaginable covered the outside. They represented us;

Corbin's hockey sticker that says "champs", Abby's spelling bee contest ribbon, and Patrick's drawing of Superman encompassed the beat up vehicle. With most of us bringing our breakfast on paper plates for the ride, the half mile drive was full of singing and punching. The smell of Eggo waffles and dust mixed in the air, and always clung to our clothes for the rest of the day. Our teachers knew how we came to school. Normally late, most likely forgetting something, and with dirt on our legs and arms. They prepared by leaving the side gate open so we could pull straight in and park behind our classes. A sight not commonly seen is a 9 year old boy driving 4 other kids to class on a golf cart, yet we made the kids in GMC carpool feel as if they were the ones doing school arrival wrong. The staff at school referred to us as the "Cameo Crew". The name stuck, as did our friendships, and it is still our group chat name to this day.

When the school week was over, that did not mean that the golf cart got a break. On Sunday morning after one of the dads would make us breakfast burritos (extra bacon for Kelley), we head out for "Sun's Up Sundays". Abby and I always hand in hand, would skip outside and grab our pink cowboy hats from the garage on the way. We would grab a jump rope and tie it from the back of the golf cart to our pink Jeep from the Target toy section, and prepare for a ride in circles from one of our dads. As neither of us ever liked to admit we need to stop, the rule became "when your hats fly off, the ride is done". Each time we tried to tie a knot at the bottom of our chin so the hats stayed on longer, but no matter how tight they would always fly with the wind eventually. "You ready?" my dad yells as he turns back to look at the two of us. Abby and I look at each other and chant, "One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, now go dad go, let's ride!". The wheels of my mini car barely keep up with the speed, and the tire rubber comes off by the minute. With squeals of joy Abby and I would throw our hands up, looking up at the sky spinning in circles above us. The other neighbors would watch from the side,

anxiously waiting their turn. That moment trapped in time represented what the cul-de-sac was all about. We created memories with each other as if we were siblings, at the same time as our parents becoming best friends. Our parents helped this joy and excitement flourish and are the reason we can look back at this time in our life with such happiness and fond memories.

As we grew up, the cul-de-sac was filled with different activities in accordance with our age. As a kid it was anything from a basketball court, hopscotch setup, movie nights on the grass, or hide and seek. But when all of us went to different high schools, the basketball hoop gathered dust and the blacktop chalk was left untouched. This street went from being our corner of infinite possibilities and adventures to needing a special occasion to meet up there. Paige was the number one soccer player in the nation, Stefan was training to be a pilot, Morgan was applying to all Ivy League schools, and my brother was training to attend the West Point Military Academy. The chances of everyone's schedules aligning was next to none. Nonetheless, everyone came together at the end of the street to support on various celebratory occasions. High school graduation photos, first date pickups, and celebratory lap in the back of the truck with championship trophies held up high. We were always there.

Alex was the first to leave for college. Although he was just going an hour north to USC, this felt like the end of an era. We were growing up and moving onto so many different adventures in our lives. On the day of his move in, he brought his car around to the end of the cul-de-sac to wave goodbye. All of us kids and our parents were standing in a line with tears down our cheeks, trying to console each other although each person was more of a mess than the last. I remember looking up to see the sign that said "We love you, Alex" waving from the flagpole. Looking back, that flag was waving goodbye to our childhood.

That day was one of the last times we were all together in our meet up spot in front of my house. Although we don't spend as much time there anymore, it still holds such a special place in everyone's heart. Knowing this, my brother Jake knew there was no better place to ask Max to be one of his groomsmen than in that spot. In the summer of 2023, my brother was a year out of getting married. When planning to ask Max to be in his wedding, he texted him saying, "Meet me in the cul-de-sac." Max walked the 100 feet to the end of the street to see Jake standing there with two baseball gloves from the T-ball season they played together. They were labeled "M" and "J" in black sharpie, which was done so after their first season game when the parents weren't looking. On the inside of the glove Jake wrote, "This is where it all started, you are my brother for life. Will you be one of my groomsmen?" Max looked up at him, as he always has since they were little, and broke down in tears. My family and a few of the neighbors that were able to make it were watching from the balcony and cheering them on, looking down at a glimpse of the beautiful friendships we have created here.

The earliest memories I have are from Turnleaf Lane, and within every single one of them I am surrounded by these 12 people. I will always be a part of the Cameo Crew, whether or not I am physically there. It was the most fun, loving, and adventurous community that anyone would strive to raise their children around. Everyone in Tustin knew the "Cameo Crew" and knew if they saw one of us, the other 11 were most likely right behind. I cannot imagine going through life without these extended family members by my side, and am so grateful they will always be a part of my life.



I told my neighborhood that I was writing this paper and they sent some pictures! I thought that I should add these at the bottom so you can see, it was truly the best childhood!