

The Finches Take Flight

As many of you know, Bob and Sue Finch, who resided for 55 years at #113 West Walnut Lane, left us in May of this year to take up residence with their son Richard and his wife Pam at their home in Upper Black Eddy, Pennsylvania, a charming village on the Delaware River, approximately twenty miles north of New Hope.



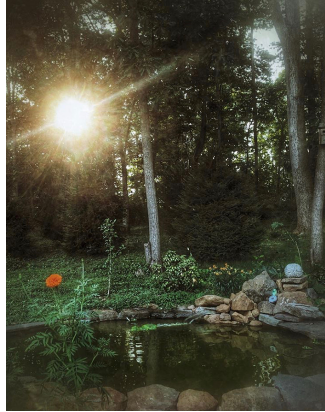
Sue and Robert Finch

The Finches were at the heart of this neighborhood in so many ways, going all the way back to the 1960s, when Sue and her cohorts successfully blocked a proposed expressway that would have sliced Germantown in two. Buoyed by that success, she led a small but fervent band of interested residents in forming West Central Germantown Neighbors, with the goal of preventing properties from being bought up by developers taking advantage of lamentably underpriced housing stock to convert it to institutional uses.

They raised their three children—Susan, Richard, and Amy—on Walnut Lane, while Sue worked close to home, first for the pediatricians at Green and Walnut Lane, then at Project Learn where their children were in school. Bob was Chairman of the Art Department at the Haverford School and taught painting classes at the Main Line Art Center. A talented and prolific creator of drawings and paintings, Bob is celebrated for his drawings and paintings (in pencil, charcoal, oils, egg tempera—including many portraits of people in the neighborhood. Sue was known for her exuberant garden stretching all the way from the back of their yard to the street, with gorgeous flowers bursting over the sidewalk, much to the delight of passersby.

The Finches were never shy about sharing their home and garden with others. Together with the Jonathan Rhoads family at #131, they inaugurated a Memorial Day tradition way back in 1966 whereby the entire neighborhood was invited for softball games behind the Rhoads house, followed by a lavish picnic in the Finches' yard. And, on Christmas Eve every year, Sue organized caroling that originated at the UU House nursing home, wended its merry way around the neighborhood, and then warmed up in the Finch kitchen, enjoying hot mulled cider and baked treats.

Constrained by the coronavirus lockdown, their neighbors were saddened by their inability to give Sue and Bob the sendoff they so richly deserved. However, many neighbors have expressed their memories and good wishes in writing, and they make for a delightful read. Bob and Sue Finch are always welcome back; they may be absent from Walnut Lane, but they are never far from our affection.



Sue and Robert's new home!

Neighborhood Wishes and Stories

FROM SUSAN AND WILLI BANK:

Sue and Bob are artists. 113 W. Walnut Lane was their studio. Her folk creations are Originals Sues. Bob is a more measured artist. His works hang in many Germantown homes including ours.

Before the pandemic, favorite outings with the Finches included attending openings at the Imperfect Gallery, sharing the Christmas gospel program at Bright Hope Baptist Church in North Philadelphia, dancing at FUMCOG to the Dukes of Destiny, and jitterbugging at the Commodore Barry Club.

Bob and I had a brief love affair with food. If I cooked a gourmet hot meal, we would deliver it to his door. Sue was my personal guide to gardening. We swapped plants. In the spring of 2020, she generously told us "help yourself to all the hellebores and peonies you want from my garden".

Willi was the doctor in residence and he frequently made house calls. He remembers Sue as 'the cop on the block'. He and Bob shared models for their canvases.

I respect them for making tough choices when it comes time to downsizing. And to accept the nagging insults of ageing.

When we moved into 124 West Walnut Lane in the heat of July 1977, Sue crossed the street and greeted me in the front garden, "Welcome, but this will always be the Wolf House!" 113 West Walnut Lane will always be the Finch house!

Susan and Willi Bank

FROM ANDREW BECK:

Thank you for offering this opportunity to honor and celebrate the Finches. I missed bumping into Sue and Bob at recent WCGN functions and was concerned. I am grateful that they are moving in with their son as family has always been important to Sue and Bob.

What I will always remember about the Finches are their generosity, kindness, creativity, and warmth of spirit. Sue and Bob were always quick with a smile and hug/handshake, and always made us feel welcome. Sue happily shared the abundance of her garden with neighbors. The day

lilies and irises that bloom every year in our back yard come from splittings of Sue's beds. (Sadly, the really cool perennial begonias stopped surfacing two years back, but they were Sue's as well.)

The heavy blue bowl in our kitchen and the small golden oak side table behind our couch came from a Finch yard sale. I will miss hearing first-hand updates about Sue's garden and family or learning of Bob's art in galleries as WCGN gatherings.

Blessing to them both for this next stage of life! Please send them our best.

In gratitude,
Andrew Beck

FROM LOIS BRUCKNER:

Sue, your determination and kindness have always impressed me. You have been a role model for me, and others in our neighborhood, I am sure.

Bob, you are so talented, humble and cheery. I always smile when I see or think of you.

I wish you both a lovely time with your son. We may not see one another often, but you will always be with me.

Lois Bruckner

FROM LINDA AND STEVE CORSOVER:

Many of us in the neighborhood are aware of the beautiful artwork that Bob has done over the years, especially his super-sized portraits. The spectacular ones of Luke Russell, and of Bill Wood and Susan Wright were my introduction to his painting, but I also loved the smaller ones he hung in his one-man show in Chestnut Hill several years ago.

I also love Sue's artwork, which was quirky, funky, and involved found objects much of the time. I saw a metal "wreath" with lights and found objects she had made, and commissioned her to make one for us, using smashed coke cans as a theme. (My particular vice.) Any of you who visited our house at 258 W Tulpehocken saw it hanging over the dining room mantle for all the years, lit up any time we felt festive. Then later we commissioned another wreath as a present for our daughter. This time Sue used a bicycle wheel and decorated it with Mardi Gras items. We still have both wreaths and will hang them when we finally get to unpack at our new house.

I was always impressed by the love that the 2 of them seem to have in their long marriage. One day, walking in Chestnut Hill, I passed the 2 of them walking down Germantown Ave., holding hands. "It's our 60th anniversary today" They said, beaming! (I could be wrong about the number, but it was a BIG one)

Their house and garden were always a treat to visit, Sue was generous with her plants, and many came to our Tulpehocken house. Going into the house was also a treat, surrounded by all the art.

Much luck to them in their new home!

Linda and Steve Corsover

FROM KIMBERLY AND JOHAN DeJONG

Sue, your lovely garden ("A green thought in a green shade") and your fig tree and towering giant will remain our view even though someone else will be tending them. Should have taken the hosta you offered me several times; there are now two kinds in our yard. I remember when I complained to you, our third year in the neighborhood, that suddenly I was being bitten by mosquitoes. You drew me close and whispered in my ear, "They didn't know before that you were here."

Our love and best wishes to you both.
Kimberly and Johan

FROM ANDREW DUNAKIN AND PACA NARVAEZ:

Beyond the innumerable times we walked by their house and had a brief chat with Sue while she was tending her garden, one instance sticks out to us. Bob was standing on their front porch and Sue (like usual!) was weeding or thinning or planting or just tending (!) while we walked by. Bob, after a few minutes chat, said he was going to have a few artist friends and neighbors over to their house and they were looking for a subject. He thought Paca would be perfect! Paca sat for them a couple of times (and was paid!) and overall, it was an enjoyable experience for her. She found it interesting to see the artists focus and attention to their craft.

A couple of years later, we passed by their house again and Bob said, "Hey! Would you like one of those studies I did? I'll give it to you!" Suffice it to say, it sits (professionally framed) in a central place of our house so all can look, marvel, and comment, "That's a wonderful painting of Paca!"

Thanks for the memories Bob and Sue! It has been a true pleasure to know you and have you as our neighbors!

Andrew and Paca

FROM BETH AND BOB EMMOTT:

We live across the street from Sue and Robert's Germantown home and I could always tell it would be a good day when I looked out my bedroom window after waking and Sue was in the garden. She liked to garden early, before the sun was up and it got too hot. Her garden included both inside and outside their iron fence and when she was working towards the street, Robert always put out a traffic cone he had found to protect her as she was working away. I so miss her in the mornings.

Like with others, Sue was our first introduction to Walnut Lane as she stopped over to welcome us and also to make sure we knew the "rules" of the neighborhood!

We have two of Robert's large stone lithographic prints—I think my fav is "Mermaid Reading", beautifully drawn it depicts a mermaid lying on the bottom of the sea, reading her book. It makes me smile every time I see it.

I grew up near their new home and am sure they will enjoy discovering their new world but want them to know that they left a bit of "Finch" in all our hearts.

Beth and Bob Emmott

FROM THEIR DAUGHTER SUSAN FINCH:

We moved to 113 W Walnut Lane in 1965. The back yard was waist-high in weeds, and over the years our mother transformed both the front and back yards.

First our mother worked as a receptionist for Doctors Malisoff and Gold Pediatrics. She loves children, so this was a special place for her to work. Then she worked at Project Learn as a secretary, where she was a vital staff member at that small school and took care of the children when they needed a band-aid or a shoulder to cry on. Those children included Susan and Amy.

Our mother started the annual Christmas Caroling as well as the Memorial Day Picnic. She empowered neighbors to share food and themselves. Everyone was welcome. The Picnic started in Dr Shoup's backyard in the mid-sixties and grew so large that the Rhoadses offered to host it. Christmas Caroling expanded as well. The local old age homes looked forward to our visits. My parents are good at connecting people, making people feel welcome and loved.

Our mother was one of the organizers of The Germantown Food Co-op, which started in the basement of Hal Lloyd's church (the one on the corner of Greene and Tulpehocken) [Germantown Community Presbyterian Church]. She gathered neighbors together (and all three of her children) to join her at the Food Distribution Center at 4 AM where they bought fresh produce. This turned into another co-op and yet another and eventually became Weavers Way.

A typical event:

My mother was working in the front garden of our home when she noticed an African American child of about 10 years of age being put into a police car. (We can't remember his name.) She dropped her spade and garden gloves and said to the police, "Wait! I know that child, he lives in the neighborhood. Where are you taking him?" They refused to release him into her care, so she jumped into the back seat of the police care and accompanied him to the station. She stayed with him until he was released. Many years later, the young boy (now a grown man) walked by our home, saw our mother, gave her a huge hug and told her how grateful he was to her for sticking by him when he was little.

Sue was a vital part of Friends of Vernon Park, along with Robert and Ruth Seeley; she joined other neighbors in getting rid of graffiti in the neighborhood and on Walnut Lane Bridge; she turned the empty lot at Walnut Lane & Germantown Ave into a community garden; and—along with our father—was part of the Neighborhood Watch for safety in the streets.

As for Sue's creative side, in addition to garden designing she created very fanciful recycled art (such as hubcaps turned into Christmas wreathes) and was a producer at Allens Lane Art Center with Kate Shaffmaster for over 10 years, producing many plays.

My parents always invited people into their home. If someone was lonely at Thanksgiving they were invited. As recently as last year when strangers passed our front garden and stopped to admire it our parents would engage in conversation, invite them to the back yard and create new friendships. For instance, they welcomed Chris and Amy Esposito when they first moved in.

Growing up on Walnut Lane made for a rich childhood!

Susan Finch

FROM JANE GUERIN:

Back in the 70's, I first heard of Sue Finch working at Project Learn. I don't remember much contact, though, until I moved to West Central Germantown—West Walnut Lane in particular—a most wonderful place to live!! We all lived on this street and I enjoyed all their plants and flowers every time I went by their house.

At some point, I found out that their daughter made beautiful “ornaments” out of unusually shaped lightbulbs—maybe Sue too. Being a person who **must** find a use or purpose for **everything**, I was overjoyed to know that my old light bulbs could still brighten up “the world” in a different and elegant way. Hence, I would keep a box or bag until it would travel down the street to the Finches' home. [Is there anyone else who wants to carry on the tradition?]

I do wish Bob and Sue all the very best in their new home! Yes, we will miss you and hope that, in your new place, you will keep the lights “burning” and find joy in all your artwork of which you had much. Do take care and may you be blessed in the new chapter of your life.

Jane Guerin

FROM CLAIRE OWEN AND DAVID PLANTE:

When we moved to Greene Street 21 years ago, Sue was the first neighbor we met. It took her no time to recruit David and I to become active in WCGN. Although we have not been as involved these past years, our time working with Sue, Bob, and all our other neighbors were some of our most rewarding time spent here in Germantown. They will be missed. I hope whoever moves into the house on Walnut Lane can maintain Sue's wonderful front garden!

All our best and warmest regards to them in their new home
David and Claire

FROM LUKE AND MARJORIE RUSSELL:

Dear Bob and Sue,

Who will now paint flowers
On a wall or plant them
Along a city street?

Who will paint a neighbor-
hood's portraits and remind us all
Of who we are and who we have become?

Who strode into the mayor's office
And with but one compatriot had
A four-lane bypass canceled?

Who was all by herself a neighbor-
hood organization, knew the chinks
And crooks and creaks that had accrued
Over a hundred years and would hold
It and them all together?

Who was an activist force of nature
Levying the heat of her Albanian fury
At injustice and incivility?

Who caroled each Christmas eve,
Then served hot mulled cider
In a warmed mug?

Yes, and we'll miss you both from now
Until all measures of time are gone.

Luke and Marjorie

FROM LINDA SANDERS:

I will miss Sue and Bob Finch, walking slowly hand and hand down Walnut Lane, I surely will. My mind will automatically go back to when I was walking my dog Buster, that she (Sue) asked me was I prepared to pick up my dog's poop, I showed her the bag, and she grinned at me. So, to this day when I walk my pup down Walnut Lane I think of that day. Sue and Bob, whenever they saw me was ALWAYS smiling and spoke cordially to me AND THE DOG! They were and still are great folks, and I am glad that their son will be looking after them with care.

Be Well, Bob and Sue, thank you for being a part of my Happiness.

Love always
Linda Gail & McCallum Sanders

FROM RUTH AND BOB SEELEY:

Bob first met Sue when he set up her computer followed by occasional troubleshooting.

We had known Sue for some time when in 2010 I volunteered to join her on early morning gardening visits to Vernon Park. We would go at 6:30 in the morning to avoid the bugs, usually 2 or 3 of us to attack the overgrown areas where trees, shrubs and vines had gone wild for lack of attention. As a founding member of the Friends of Vernon Park, Sue was part of one of the first 4 park friends groups in the city, organized by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in 1993. She had been keeping in touch with 2 or 3 long time members of FoVP for a number of years. She fundraised tirelessly by selling flowering bulbs in the spring and mums in the fall. Her dedication kept the group going through tough times.

In 2010, Sue invited me to join her at a meeting called by the Tookany/Tacony Frankford Watershed Partnership in the Vernon House. A group of Germantown stakeholders met to plan a rain garden in front of the Center in the Park. That was the beginning of a new learning process about stormwater management and the advantage of native plantings.

As the garden took shape, we began FoVP monthly meetings and invited the new volunteers. Our group is still small but has made Vernon Park into the "emerald of Germantown" it is today. A huge community resource even during Covid-19 restrictions. An oasis.

As I said when Sue "retired" from the leadership of the group, everything we did after that was built on her shoulders and the dedicated and persistent work of the earlier volunteers.

Sue taught me one of the best gardening tips I've ever been given—how to spray white vinegar on weeds between brick work while the sun is out without damaging the ecosystem. I miss taking bags of shredded paper for her garden paths and visiting her at 113.

Ruth & Bob Seeley

FROM ROSE SLATER:

Thank you for sharing your garden and your time. Friends of Vernon park will always remember your love for our community.



Rose Slater

FROM JULIE STAPLETON-CARROLL:

Susan was the very first person we met from the neighborhood when we moved in. In August of 2003 we moved into our house at 130 W Walnut Ln. After signing all the paperwork and with the house finally ours, Keith and I were very excited to go over there immediately and check out our new home. It was probably mid-afternoon and quite warm since it was early August. We had the keys in our hand and tried to open up the front door. But the keys weren't working. Feeling a little nervous that we looked like we were trying to break in, we decided to try the back door. The keys worked and we started to go in only to be met by an extremely loud security alarm going off. It wasn't extremely loud inside the house, no, the loud noise was coming from the very large external speaker mounted on the side of the house. Of course, we didn't know what the code was to deactivate the alarm system. The Bank's next door were in New Hampshire, so they weren't bothered by the noise. We began to frantically try to dial our real estate agent when we looked up and this wispy figure was standing in front of us looking us up and down. It was, of course, Sue in all her glory protecting the neighborhood. Finally, she asked what we might be doing here. When we explained she welcomed us warmly to the neighborhood and has been a great friend since.

To the chagrin of my children Sue was the eyes and ears of the neighborhood. For years their bus stop required them to walk past the Finches house twice a day. Sue was old school in her approach to community and had no hesitation telling my kids to stop throwing stones into the street, to stop climbing the neighboring apartment building or to stop bickering loudly. She showed the same commitment to shared neighborhood child-rearing in having employed all three of my children, at one point or another, doing work in her breathtaking garden.

Sue was always out front, but I was able to bond a bit with Bob more recently as we moved into the covid lockdown. I put it out there for all my neighbors that I was making bi-weekly runs to pick up pre-ordered groceries from Shoprite and to let me know if they needed anything. A number of neighbors took me up on this. We were always trying to score TP but, also, I would get lists for those items that we miss and cherish. Most of the folks emailed me their orders. Since Bob doesn't have an email, he would phone his in. Sometimes I was not able to pick up the phone so he would leave his order on a voicemail. I think food says a lot about a person and Bob's choices always told me that he is simple man of habit who is thoughtful and likes small pleasures. I was so happy to help other people that I really didn't care about getting paid back for anything. Bob was insistent, however, and

to my surprise, one day my postman handed me a letter, complete with postmark, from Bob with a check in it.

My only regret is that I didn't get a chance to buy one of Bob's paintings. I am looking for something to commemorate my covid experience. A small painting of Bob's work would do it for me. Please let me know if there is any way to get ahold of one of his paintings.

I wish them all the best and we miss them terribly. Perhaps we can get the city to rename our block Finch Lane.

Here are pictures of my daughter's prom photos. Sue and Bob let us take the photos at her house and garden. They were beautiful.

Julie



FROM SUSAN WRIGHT:

This is my favorite tale involving Sue and Bob Finch. There was a time when our neighborhood was beset with thieves who were stealing our iron fences and gates. When I got word from Catherine Franklin from Penn Knox that a dark blue or black van was the suspected vehicle involved in the robberies, I passed the information on to Sue.

Several days later Sue was awake in the early morning and heard a vehicle idling; so, of course she looked out the window and saw a van that matched the thief's description. She immediately woke up Bob and got dressed. The van had moved so they started cruising the neighborhood looking for it. Sure enough, they soon found him on Greene St. They went back home to call the police—this was before cell phones. The police didn't want to hunt down the van if it moved so they ran to their car and went back to where the van had been. The driver was getting ready to move on, so Sue jumped out of the car and went up to the thief. Thinking quickly, she asked the man for directions to try and keep him occupied until the police could arrive. Arrive they did and arrested the man and compounded the van.

When the man had his preliminary hearing Sue, Bob, and I went, along with a group of neighbors. Aldo Caparelli was one of the thief's victims; when he was questioned by the public defender assigned to the case Aldo said his gate was one of the ones the police found in the van. Attorney:

"How can you be sure it was your gate? Don't they all look alike?" Aldo: "My address was on it!" The man was eventually found guilty.

This a true story of how Sue rolled: with tenancy and spunk.

Susan Wright