
This Dayton Life

Stories About Dayton Homeowners Written
by Students from Stivers School for the Arts



Edited by Caitlin Closser



Special Thanks: Rebuilding Together Dayton; Wesley Community Center for providing transportation to This Dayton Life; University of Dayton Printing Services, Juliet Fromholt of WYSO for teaching interviewing techniques; Bill Steinmetz of Stivers School for the Arts; Cindy Closser for driving homeowners to their interviews; Katie Baumgardner and Joe Grunenwald for planning help; Jessica Ledbetter, Jessica Gibson-James, Linda Turk, and Alexis McLaughlin for editing; Adrienne Oliss for copyediting; Todd White for photography; Scott Bruns and Tom Mayer for recording equipment; Jennifer Terry for assembling a picture slideshow.

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Table of Contents



Page 4: “Fred Dewinter” by
Brett Bower and Jordan
Thompson

Page 5: “Optimistic Views of an
Optimistic Woman” (Lisa Gray)
by Sarah Crone and Emily Pizza



Page 6: “Margaret Hardin” by Bryan Manger and Francesca Snyder



Page 7: “Synthia Jackson: A Fulfilled Life” by Robert Dewar and Karugu Kinywa



Page 8: “Grandma B”
(Beatrice Martin) by
An’Draeh Heard and
Shakehira Rutledge



Page 9: “Mrs. Truett” (Joanne Luitich-Truett) by Kaitlyn Danner and Lynnze English





Page 10: “Memories of a Dayton Life Well Lived” (Sally Woolfolk) by Jonica Springer and Jerica Starks



Page 11: “Learning to Believe” (Jimmy Truett) by Kayla Rike and Brittany Wood



Page 12: “Day(ton)s and Years” (Virginia Mitchell)
by Michael Mehaffey and Bryan Smith



Page 13: “With Fond Memories, Dayton
Woman is Hopeful for Future” (Edith
Frison) by Jessica Ledbetter



Poems by Frederick Ponder and Zet Arcilla



The Good Ole Days in Dayton

By Freddie Ponder and Zet Arcilla

The streets were once crowded

The city lights shined bright

the buildings stood up so high

that they mixed with the colors of the sky.

The busy sounds of downtown

Fill the air along with the constant chatter

Many of the city's qualities disappeared in an instant

But her forgotten beauty will remain with us forever.

Fred Dewinter

Brett Bower and Jordan Thompson

Every person has his story. Some are more solemn than others, but all are stories, just the same. As Fred was speaking, we began to form an image of what his personality was like. He speaks with an unusual accent that is part southern and part urban, which we think is awesome. He's humble and straightforward. Although he isn't really the talkative type, he's ready to tell his story.

Fred Dewinter has lived in Dayton for over 20 years, and he says that this city has been, for the most part, good to him. "I like Dayton a lot; it's been good to me and my loved ones," he stated. He said that he had seen a lot of changes over the last 18 years. Even though he didn't elaborate, we understood a couple of the changes that he had implied, for example, many of Dayton's jobs leaving. Then we asked him to name his favorite thing about Dayton. Fred told us that Daytonians are always willing to help out a person in need. We agreed with Fred when he said this, and we also feel that this is one of the most valued aspects about Dayton.

Fred owns a snow-white German shepherd named Rich. From everything he said about his dog, both Brett and I understood just how much Fred loves Rich. "I enjoy my time with him. He's a really great dog." Later, after a few questions, we found that Fred Dewinter is not as tough and gruff as his voice sounds. He is kind, warmhearted, and a genuine animal lover.

Life has not always been easy for Fred and his family. Fred's wife worked in a nursing home for more than 18 years, but was let go because of a sudden disability. This was a challenge for Fred and his family, and it wasn't the only one they have had to face.

"My kid sister worked for GM for 12 years, but because of the GM crisis that took place not too long ago, she lost her job there," Fred said. He added that now, she's also about to lose her present job. Fred believes that the government should generate more jobs, and he thinks that situations like the one his sister is in could have been avoided.

However, we believe that solutions trump any problem, and that the right people could reverse setbacks and restore our economy to its former glory. The most influential thoughts from people today come from those who are Fred's age and older, the senior citizens of the United States. What they have to say is important because they've lived longer than we have, and therefore they know more. All we have to do is take the time to listen to them. A city needs the support of all the citizens who live in it, especially the senior citizens. If we are ever to fix the world's problems, the thoughts of people like Fred have to count. After hearing Fred's story, we have a new respect for people Fred's age.

"Never give up, just keep trying, no matter what." This is Fred's motto, and it is simple, straightforward, and powerful all at the same time. Never give up, even if things seem impossible. Fred Dewinter has dealt with some hard knocks in his life. Those hardships have given him wisdom and experience. Fred Dewinter is a man with a story, and that story is definitely worth telling.

Little Miss Sunshine

(based on the interview of Lisa Gray)

By Freddie Ponder

So optimistic!

Can't knock her spirits down.

You have to adore her!

She never shows a frown.

So bubbly and upbeat,

She loves to talk!

Fought through hard times

But never lost her spark.

Optimistic Views of an Optimistic Woman

Emily Pizga and Sarah Crone

Lisa Gray, a very optimistic woman, moved to her neighborhood 14 years ago with her beloved dog, Sparky. She saved Sparky after finding him abandoned in her old neighborhood. Ms. Gray knows all of her neighbors and has a real sense of community. She's always loved her home but now even more since Rebuilding Together Dayton remodeled it to meet her specific needs.

Ms. Gray has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, "a debilitating disease marked by patches of hardened tissue in the brain or the spinal chord and associated esp. with partial or complete paralysis and jerking muscle tremor." (Webster's Dictionary). She is now wheelchair bound. Before Rebuilding Together Dayton fixed her home, each day posed a daunting task. "It was very difficult to walk up and down the stairs to do laundry," said Ms. Gray.

Rebuilding Together Dayton put in ramps, fixed pipes, brought her washer and dryer upstairs, and cleaned up the house. Ms. Gray says that this was the happiest time in her home. "I'd have to drag my groceries inside before they installed the ramps. It was so difficult," says Ms. Gray. She says that the disease she has is a relapsing and remitting problem, which means that sometimes she can walk and sometimes she can't. Before this debilitating illness struck, Ms. Gray was a computer assistance analyst: she created databases for computers.

Since her retirement, Ms. Gray has had no work outside her home. She describes her life as "living in the moment" since every day she does something different from the day before. She states that she is very satisfied and happy. Every day she takes care of her dog as if it were her child, loving him unconditionally. Sparky is her baby, even though he is 18, and he requires lots of attention and care, which takes up most of the day.

Ms. Gray has no regrets. She sees no reason to waste energy on regrets about the past. She feels that she has learned from every mistake that she has made. If she had a chance to do everything over, she says, "I would have tried to live more in the moment all my life instead of just doing it in retirement."

In her old neighborhood, Ms. Gray was happy, but since moving into the house that she has now, she is happier. Ms. Gray says that she doesn't really have a dream home: "My home is definitely not a dream home, but I'm happy here. My home is beautiful and I'm thankful for it," she says, "even more now since Rebuilding Together Dayton fixed it for me."

Ms. Gray says that Dayton is not a bad place to live. It may not be exciting for visitors, but she likes it, and she encourages people in the suburbs who are having money problems to live in the city. She says that she feels a sense of community all over Dayton. She is happy and content.

Margaret Hardin

Bryan Manger and Francesca Snyder

“I’ve never been one to conform . . . living in the city is absolutely refreshing,” Margaret Harden, who goes by “Charlie,” said about moving to Dayton from the suburbs. Charlie has lived in the Dayton area for 30 years and in the historic district of the city for 15. She has seen the neighborhood “evolve a lot” through her years there and has found it “interesting to watch.” Charlie’s home was chosen for the Christmas in April project. Seventy people, everyone from the Girl Scouts to the Air Force, from Miami Valley Hospital employees to interior designers, came around to help work on her two-story Victorian. “It was absolutely amazing . . . like lots of ants all over my house,” she said, her face lighting up at the memory. Since the project, she’s been “looking for a way to help, give something back”--that’s why she agreed to be interviewed.

Charlie was born in Chicago and has lived all over the United States. Her favorite place was Denver, Colorado. It was “a great place to be a teenager; that was a good time to be a teenager,” she said, recalling the freedoms of the 1950s. If she misses anything about Denver, it’s the weather. That’s the one thing she hates about Ohio. It can be cloudy for six weeks at a time. But Charlie isn’t the type of person to let this get her down; she installed a full-spectrum light bulb in her home to make up for the lack of sun.

Charlie didn’t have high expectations when she first came to Dayton, but she has found a home here. The skyline, Carillon Park, and Wegerzyn Garden Center are a few of the things she loves about Dayton. The city feels comfortable, “like this is where I’m supposed to be.” Her words say a lot for the city, since Charlie has traveled around the world. Italy, Mexico, and New York City are just a few of the locations she listed. Venice was “magical,” her favorite of all the places she’s been. Charlie has owned her own businesses, retail and a floral shop, and worked with stained glass. Her favorite part of work was interacting with the public.

Life has not always been as Charlie expected. There have been good times and bad times, such as losing a soulmate to cancer, but she “really has had a good life.” When she can’t see how something will work out, she “just turn[s] it over to someone else, someone higher.” When she didn’t know how she was going to keep working on her house, a chance came to her through Christmas in April, and she is very grateful. Charlie believes that the world is full of good people.

Thankful for the life she is experiencing, Charlie passes this lesson to others: “There is a higher power. There is someone out there bigger than we are. If you don’t always turn to that higher power, do so in times of trouble. Your prayers won’t always be answered the way you want them to be, but they will be answered.”

Synthia Jackson: A Fulfilled Life

Robert Dewar and Karugu Kinnya

Having grown up in the once-prosperous Dayton past, Cynthia Jackson holds memories that she is willing to share. Living with her paternal grandparents as a child, in a big house rich in history, she had a wonderful childhood. She lived in a friendly environment that contributed to her well-rounded character. Her grandmother was a cook for some of the wealthiest people in Dayton, like the Pattersons and the Ketterings. This allowed Cynthia to be treated to some great experiences, like seeing Mr. Patterson's personal workshop. Her education included lessons in tap, ballet, piano, and elocution.

Because Cynthia has lived in Dayton all her life and inherited her grandparents' house, she has seen the city in the best and worst of times. She has met with the people of Dayton in her various jobs. However many disadvantages Dayton has, Cynthia sees them balanced by the city's unique art scene. She believes that the arts show the true spirit of the city and its ability to remain vibrant.

In college, Cynthia studied biology, chemistry, and voice, but then switched to music theory. After college, she became involved in her community. She volunteered at the Victoria theater and sang in the Philharmonic Chorus. She also worked at many different jobs.

The reason for Cynthia's various occupations is that she grew bored with them. However, in one case, she simply walked off the job. In college, she served breakfast before classes. Her boss was a big woman who behaved like a drill sergeant. She treated the mentally challenged workers harshly. Cynthia thought this was very wrong, so left in the middle of a shift.

Synthia attended medical school at The Ohio State University. While there, she was having trouble academically. Cynthia tried to seek help from her teachers, who suggested her that she might be dyslexic. However, when she tried to get tested for dyslexia, she was denied. Cynthia later decided this may have been for the best, since she was worried that her dyslexia may cause her to make a terrible mistake in prescribing or teaching about medicine.

Synthia has seen many things in this city, and if she could change Dayton, she would start by working to prevent violence among Dayton's young people. In addition, she would bring more jobs to Dayton.

Synthia Jackson sees great possibility for growth in Dayton because of the potential of its youth. However, there is a need for a greater communication and understanding. People need to have more patience for the future of Dayton.

Among Cynthia Jackson's accomplishments is her novel, *Lessons*. It is the story of many different characters, all of whom have their own lessons to learn in life, such as love and forgiveness. Through her determination, she succeeded in publishing the novel herself.

An experienced and learned person must travel the world as Synthia has. I think she has a great understanding of people and the world which comes from her traveling to all areas of the world, including Mexico, Canada, the Bahamas, and Europe.

Synthia is fully satisfied with her life. For years she has been surrounded by compassion and love. For Synthia, one quote from the movie *Ghost* always comes to mind: “The love you give, it keeps coming back to you.”

Grandma B

Shakebra Rutledge and An'draeh Heard

Bea Martin is a 75-year-old Dayton resident who has lived here basically her whole life. She lives in the Westwood area in Dayton, a mostly African American area with a young population. Martin is also a foster parent and has adopted several children. She is a single mother now, but has been married once before.

The young teenagers and children refer to Martin as “Grandma B” because that’s how close they are to her. Grandma B is a lively person who loves kids. She contributes a lot to her community, such as getting the neighbors together for meetings, and just simply having fun with everybody.

“We even barbecue together,” says Martin.

Grandma B also states that not very much has changed in her neighborhood, except for the younger generation’s moving in.

“They’ve sort of messed up our neighborly vibe,” she admits.

Grandma B has been an active member of the community by being a foster parent. Currently, she has three foster children living with her. She calls her home a home of healing because each of her foster children has come to her home with problems but later left perfectly fine.

“I really started to believe that it was true when I had my stroke,” she says about the healing nature of her home.

Grandma B suffered an unexpected stroke a couple of years back, but she didn’t realize that she was having a stroke until she went to the doctor.

Grandma B has overcome many struggles in her life. During a dark moment of her past she experimented with drugs and got on the wrong track.

“With the help of my grandmother and God, I brought myself back to reality, and I realized that there was more to life than drugs.”

Mrs. Truett

Lynnze English and Kaitlyn Danner

Mrs. Joanne Truett has lived a very full life. She says that at a young age, she was a “tomgirl” who liked to climb trees, play sports, and just have a good time. She was born in Miami, Florida, to a Scotch-Irish mother and a proudly Greek father. Because of her father’s strong heritage, she was sent to a Greek boarding school in Terrytown, New York, where she lived for two years until the place burned down. That wasn’t her last stay in New York, though. With her first husband, she lived in Rochester, New York, before he was transferred to Dayton. She disliked the freezing temperatures of New York and appreciates Dayton for its actual “seasons.”

When Mrs. Truett was 44, she and her husband took up golf so that they would have something in common. She won Super Senior of Greater Dayton and she was the Champion of Kitty Hawk. When her first husband died of cancer, she moved into assisted living, where she met and fell in love with her second husband. Together they left assisted living and moved into a home in West Carrollton. In 2003, her home burned down and Mrs. Truett spent four days in intensive care with internal and third-degree burns. She was left with emphysema and apnea and now has to wear a breathing machine for six hours every night while she sleeps. Today, she and her husband live in the Santa Clara neighborhood in Dayton.

When Rebuilding Together Dayton first came to her home to weed her garden, patch up cracks in her ceiling, and paint, she enjoyed just watching the people work. She kept two groups of both adults and teenagers busy and claims, “I loved it! I loved it!”

Mrs. Truett lives in a close-knit neighborhood where most of her neighbors are up in age. She has very fond memories of Halloween in her neighborhood, where she enjoyed seeing the “adorable elaborate costumes.” She is able get along very well with her neighbors because many of them attend the same church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Mrs. Truett is very involved in her church, where she is the secretary of the Relief Society. She excels as a secretary because of her past employment. While living in Rochester, New York, she was a keypunch operator at an optical company, where she typed sales and pay slips. Then she was a telegraph operator for Southern Bell Telephone and was promoted to the position of company representative. More recently, she worked as a receptionist at Kettering Hospital. With the Relief Society, she participates in many volunteer activities, and her life of good deeds will soon be recognized by a trip to the temple.

On a normal day, Mrs. Truett gets up at 4 a.m. and reads the Bible, begins cleaning her home, and then gets on the computer to pay her bills or do other chores. Throughout the week, she attends many appointments, and Eagle One helps transport her. She lives her life through the eyes of love, “We’re all human and we all need love.” She is very thankful for what Rebuilding Together Dayton has done for her and her home.

Memories of a Dayton Life Well-Lived

Jonica Springer and Jerica Starks

“Georgia Peach” Sally J. Woolfolk came to Dayton in November of 1954, and ever since then she has loved it here. Reminiscing about her Georgia childhood and how she would wake up each morning at 4:30 to milk the cows, Sally emphasized how wonderful her early experiences had been. She went on to tell about how well-disciplined the children were back then and how much the teachers were interested in their young students. Smiling, she told us about her three brothers and six sisters: “Daddy always said that his three boys gave him more problems than his seven girls.”

January of 1955 marked a great change in Sally’s life because in that year she met her future husband. Joseph Woolfolk was being treated for multiple sclerosis at Good Samaritan Hospital, where Sally worked as a nurse’s aide. After that first meeting, the relationship moved fast. The two married in December of 1955, and soon became parents: Their daughter was born in October of 1956, and their son followed in November of 1958.

Joseph led a very successful life. He became the first black worker at Frigidaire, and later, he fought all the way to Washington, DC to receive a grant to attend Wright State University. He was a member of Wright State’s first graduating class. Despite many challenges, the Woolfolks raised their children and taught them well. Sally told us that her husband acknowledged having multiple sclerosis only after he had lived with it for 30 years!

When we asked Sally Woolfolk what she remembered about early Dayton, she mentioned the once-vital downtown and job prospects. “Downtown was very exciting,” she said. She mentioned how great the stores and restaurants were: “It was greater than the mall.” She missed all the many business offices there, but Dayton “had to move forward,” she told us. She knew that the city had to change directions.

Obviously, Sally loved talking about her children and the fact that they were well brought up. She glowed when saying that her daughter would cook and clean to the point that all Sally had to do was wash dishes. Her son, who enjoyed tutoring, excelled at math and was extremely well-read, thanks to his father. Joseph made the boy read the encyclopedia for 15 minutes every day.

During our interview, we learned much about what Sally Woolfolk enjoys doing in her spare time. She enjoys volunteering, and does so in many different places. She finds the work rewarding because she knows that others appreciate her efforts. Also, she is a proud member of Saint Paul Church, even though she is saddened by the fact that many people have left, meaning that few senior citizens worship there. When asked if she could change anything about her past, Sally mentioned finances. She told us that if she had it to do over again, she would save her money more wisely.

Spending a very special 45 minutes with Sally Woolfolk was a fascinating experience for us. We enjoyed listening to the many interesting stories she had to tell us about her life, and doing so helped us learn so much, not only about the Woolfolk family, but also about Dayton as it once was. We would like to thank Sally Woolfolk for taking the time to share her personal story and a part of Dayton’s past with us.

Coming Out On Top

(based on the interview of Jimmy Truett)

By Freddie Ponder

He has swerved left-
He has swerved right-
He has made mistakes,
But forgive and forget.

Cursed ink, and
Written upon his skin-
With horrid looks of shame.
(But God won't judge-
Everything is done for a reason.)

Keeping things clean
Transformed into a role model-
He has come out on top.

Learning to Believe

Kayla Rike and Brittany Wood

Jimmy Truett has lived in Dayton for over sixty years, and he states that Dayton is home and that he wouldn't want to live anywhere else. He was born in Kentucky, but says that poverty forced him and his parents away from their home state and into Ohio, specifically Dayton, to find jobs. One part of living in Dayton that Truett appreciates is the arts opportunities available here.

"A first impression isn't always the best impression." Jimmy Truett believes that you shouldn't judge someone before you get to know him or her. If you judge a person or a place too quickly, he thinks, you may lose someone or something that could make a great difference in your life.

Truett has overcome many obstacles. After losing his first wife, whom he says he never felt compatible with, he met his current wife, Joanne. Now, they are living happily in their home with their pets. Among the couple's challenges, though, is the fact that Truett suffered a stroke. He was in a nursing home for more than four months and in a coma for several weeks. During that time, Truett couldn't talk or walk. Joanne was always at his bedside. He says that he told her to go home and rest, but she stayed with him. This situation has brought the couple even closer together, Truett believes. Truett also admits that he was once a heavy drinker. He thinks that God blessed him and his first wife by not giving them children because the drinking would not have allowed Truett to be a good parent.

Truett has some tattoos on his hands that he was hesitant to talk about. He didn't say much, but he explained that when he was younger he did some things that he is not proud of and that he wants young people to learn from. Jimmy Truett wants to reach out to young people. His message is "Don't do drugs!" (He never used drugs and doesn't think anyone should.) He also urges children to get an education, and he says that peers should not bring friends and other children down.

Still, he believes that God has forgiven him. He and his wife now attend The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Truett's life revolves around his religious beliefs, and he believes that everything that he does or sees is part of God's plan.

Jimmy and Joanne Truett live in the Santa Clara neighborhood. He describes the neighborhood as really great. His neighborhood is kept clean because one of the neighbors organizes times to clean the neighborhood. They all make an effort to keep it safe by keeping an eye on things. Jimmy says that kids today don't even begin to compare to what kids were like in his day. He hopes that things will be better in the future.

"I see Dayton getting better, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else," Truett states.

Jimmy Truett says that he found the way to get through all the hard things in his life: He believes in God and that everything happens for a reason.

Day(ton)s and Years

Bryan Smith and Michael Mehaffey

As Virginia Mitchell enters the room, the first thing that catches our attention is how young she looks, maybe barely in her sixties, with long grey hair and dressed in a conservative pink sweater with casual jeans. There's an aura of eagerness coming from her, eagerness to tell her story. We are equally eager to listen, giving her a chance to tell her story.

Growing up on a small country farm about forty miles east of Cincinnati, Virginia explains, gave her a very happy childhood that involved hunting with her father and two brothers, helping raise corn and tobacco crops, riding horses, milking cows, and watching the family's first TV set in 1948. We often hear about one-room schoolhouses in our history classes, but Virginia experienced the real deal by going to Felicity, a two-room school that she left right before her junior year.

Virginia likes Dayton but does not like the fact that her car has been broken into and egged. Still, she has gotten over that, and is optimistic about her potential for a happy life in Dayton. When Virginia was growing up, children were well behaved, but Virginia believes that many of today's youth could use a firm hand. She chuckled gently as she expressed her belief in discipline, making us wonder if her mother had the same belief.

When Virginia first moved to Dayton in 1967, the change was dramatic for her. In her hometown, she was used to stopping and talking with everyone she met on the street. However, when she moved to Dayton and tried to talk to a neighbor while walking in her neighborhood, she was ignored. Virginia was used to living in a town where no one locked their doors, so it was shocking for her to realize that it was necessary here. Still, she has overcome the giant change in her life by staying optimistic and holding on to the hope that the world can slow down and be like her hometown when she was growing up.

Her eyes looked reminiscent and far away as she shared memories of her hometown. She was lost in a beautiful swirl of happiness and sorrow at once. Virginia misses the amiable nature of people from decades ago, but she still has hope for the world--hope that it can be a more personal place again.

Virginia moved on to talk about more recent memories. She told us that her husband died in March. Although it was clear that she misses him, there was a tranquility that emanated from her like a warm candle and overshadowed the sorrow. Similarly, while she misses her hometown, she has found happiness in Dayton for being the place where she bought her first home and raised her four children.

For people our age, it is common to think of the elderly as being out of touch with our ever-evolving world. From our conversation with Virginia, we learned that we can still take lessons from the past and relate to people of a different generation. We are all people with families, someone we love, and something we care about. Maybe if we can stop to appreciate the simpler things in life and hold on to our good memories, we too can have that inner peace. Maybe we can find our way through the darkness of society and reach the inner light that guides us to happiness and human compassion, like Virginia has found with her life in Dayton.

With Fond Memories, Dayton Woman Is Hopeful for Future

Jessica Ledbetter

“I didn’t realize how cold the weather would be up here!”

Edith Frison has been calling Dayton her home since the early 1960s, yet she is still taken aback by the climate from time to time. Originally from Florida, Frison came to the Buckeye State in 1962 in hopes of finding a job. In considering her change of locale, Frison had never imagined the Midwest as her home. Not only did making a new start influence her move, but some family members were involved as well.

“My father brought me and my brother up here,” she said. “We looked at Dayton, D.C., and New Jersey.”

After visiting all three areas, the trio decided that Dayton would be their best bet. Though nothing specific came to her mind when asked about Dayton’s attractions, Frison said that the overall environment is what finally drew her and her family to stay here.

After some settling in, Frison went to work. She worked first at Holiday Inn and then at Good Samaritan Hospital as a nurse’s aide. Retiring from the hospital in 1980, she decided to do something completely different: foster care.

“I got bored,” she said. “I wanted something to do.”

By choosing this path, Frison definitely got something to do. In a span of 10 years, she took in over 100 children. Though working at Good Samaritan was a memorable experience for her, it was not an influence in her decision to participate in foster care.

To this day, Frison is still getting practice with caring for children. She sees plenty of them because her 33-year-old son lives in the Dayton area with his five daughters and a son. Frison’s husband, once a pastor, is now deceased.

So--What does a woman who has lived in Dayton for over 40 years do for fun and adventure? The answer is quite simple. She enjoys doing such basic things as going out to eat and attending church services.

Frison loves Dayton and its atmosphere, but she also understands the more recent “dying city” label that the area has received. Although many jobs have been lost in the city, she remains hopeful about Dayton’s future. She believes that if more jobs can be brought in (which she’s crossing her fingers for), the area will rebuild and even advance. Having visited larger cities in the past, Frison feels much more comfortable in Dayton. She is exceptionally content in her neighborhood, though she says that it has become noisier over the past few years.

“It does get loud,” she said. “But it’s quiet for the most part. Overall, I’d say I like it.”

Looking back on her life here in Dayton, Frison recalls only happy and pleasant memories. Although she was not born here, the place she came to visit 47 years ago has proven to be more than just a city she found by luck. It’s her home—and she begs to differ with those who have little good to say about her adopted home town:

“People should be open-minded,” she says. “This area isn’t as bad as it seems or what people are making it out to be. Give it a chance.”

The Neighborhood

By Zet Arcilla

You've been there for me
When I lost the woman I had
Dedicated my life to.
When I was in pain and sorrow
When I lost my hope
You've been there for me
When I said, "I do."
When there's no purpose in my living
You've been there for me.
When I went away
And stayed away so long
You've been there for me.
I returned to you,
My lovely city.
You've been there for me.