



The Tale of Two Bungalows

By Rev. Dale Whitney

Recently I was informed about a “very interesting older woman” who has lived near me in Bluff Heights for many years, whom I had never met even though we are quite close in age. I was told that she had once been a lawyer and that she had quite a few stories to tell about her experiences with urban wildlife. I interviewed her recently to find out more about her personal and professional life, and about what kinds of urban wildlife she had encountered in our neighborhood (my own list includes opossums, raccoons, squirrels, striped skunks, and coyotes). But when I got down to the business of actually writing the article, my focus changed completely: Why not write about the type of house we both live in? Though not the same size, they’re of the same distinctive type—the famous Craftsman Bungalow.

Where did they get their name?

The word “bungalow” came into use in English-speaking countries (including England itself) as a result of the Raj, or colonial governance of India, during the period of 1858–1947, when India was split into West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). “Bangla”—the root of “bungalow”—comes from the Urdu and Hindi languages, both of which are derived from ancient Sanskrit. “Bangla” means “house” or “home” and can be recognized in modern words like the Bengal tiger and the country of Bangladesh, which means “homeland” in Bengali, the official language of Bangladesh.

Where did they originate?

The British liked the type of architecture they found in the Bengal area of India during the Raj and immediately copied it, building many bungalows for their colonial officials. It wasn’t long before the form made it back to England itself—the first bungalows were built in Kent in 1869 as “getaways” for wealthy Londoners.

What makes bungalows distinctive?

Most bungalows are one floor on one level about four feet above a crawlspace, although a spinoff style called the California Bungalow has one room upstairs with a dormer window. There is usually a large front porch, and the beams under the eaves are open. Small models are breezy and have lots of natural light from large windows. Bungalows are a favorite of both seniors and families with small children since living on only one flat floor means no interior stairs that might prove hazardous, although exterior stairs are usually required to get from ground level to floor level. Locally such houses usually have one central gas furnace that heats the whole house—to warm a bedroom, you must leave the bedroom door open, not closed, for the heat to arrive. Most of the bungalows in Long Beach were built in the early 20th century out of old growth redwood (ouch!). Many bungalows in Southern California were shipped here as “kits” by Sears-Roebuck and other companies for assembly by local contractors or even by the first owners of the homes themselves.



What about our two local bungalows?

The bigger one (mine) and the smaller one (owned by my new friend Glenda) are both true bungalows, constructed in the middle of the bungalow craze in this area from about 1905 to 1930, when the fad ended concurrently with the beginning of the Depression years following the 1929 stock market crash. Both houses were built with just one bathroom and a gas furnace, and both are just over 100 years old, mine built in 1918 and Glenda’s in 1920. Both are up steps about four feet in the air, on a peripheral concrete foundation with a crawlspace that provides easy access to the plumbing. Mine has three bedrooms and about 1,300 square feet; hers has two bedrooms and about 1,000 square feet. Mine has a full house-width front porch; hers a small porch at the front door. We both have customized backyards: Glenda put in a special environmentally-friendly surface using water-permeable pavers, and I have an



organic garden, complete with two fruit trees, a compost pile, and a worm farm.



Rental policies

Glenda, a widow with two grown daughters, has elected not to rent out rooms. She sleeps in one of her two bedrooms and uses the other as her personal office and a bedroom for visitors. I, on the other hand, with a bigger house and no biological family, have almost always chosen to rent out rooms to known and trusted friends who have needed affordable housing. I remember one time when this formula was violated, however. I was serving on the Board of WomenShelter and one of the boys there turned 15, so their rules had him sleeping at my house for a few days until housing was found for him, his mother, and his sister. Another time this arrangement worked out very well: the brother of one of my church deacons was a plumber, so I gave him full rent credit for installing copper piping under the house, which is still working 35 years later!

Losing other bungalows in the neighborhood

Glenda and I both have been opposed to the tearing down or even the moving of other bungalows in our immediate neighborhoods. A few years after I moved into my house in 1977, the two small rental bungalows just to the north were demolished so that two side-by-side fourplexes could be built. Even though their paved parking areas were between the buildings and facing the street, the plans showed two double driveways. When the city invited all property owners within 300 feet to comment on the plans, I took one look and asked: “Why two double driveways instead of just one? It shouldn’t make any difference.” The



planners agreed with me, and I was able to save at least one valuable parking space in front of the new buildings. The city did not apply my suggestion to other similar projects, however — on the next block over there is an extra unnecessary double driveway in front of another

“take out two bungalows” project built around the same time.

Glenda’s efforts to protect the remaining bungalows in her vicinity have been more radical than mine—she very actively and publicly opposed the demolition or even the moving of a bungalow located across the street from hers, so great was her desire to not lose the historical character of her beloved neighborhood. When the conversion of a large former church building into separate apartment units for low-income senior citizens mandated the removal of another 100-year-old bungalow for a parking lot, she voiced her opposition quite vehemently. She ended up losing the battle, but at least the house was not torn down—it was moved to a vacant lot about a mile away on Termino Avenue. But Glenda still persevered, helping to ensure that the nighttime lighting in the new parking lot would not be so elevated that it would violate the privacy of nearby homes, that the automated gate be a quiet one, and that quality landscaping be a non-negotiable



part of the redevelopment package.

There it is, folks: The tale of the two bungalows! Thanks for reading!

Rev. Dale Whitney was born in Nebraska during WWII and came to California with his father, who was an osteopathic physician, and the rest of their family in 1943. He attended elementary school in the LA area, then junior high and high school in Santa Barbara. He attended Pomona College and San Francisco Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1970 as a Presbyterian minister. He was pastor of Geneva Presbyterian Church in Long Beach from 1971 to 1989 and then was manager of the Harbor Area Farmers’ Markets, a project of the South Coast Interfaith Council, from 1989 to 2016.