

When I was in growing up, my parents constantly reminded me of how lucky I was to be living in Mount Airy. Through our eyes, Mount Airy was an accepting community filled with people of good intentions. I never felt unsafe in my home or afraid to play out on the street. Life was bliss and my childhood was free of worry. On one Sunday afternoon in the winter of second grade, this all changed.

I was sitting in the living room with my mom, drawing cartoons and drinking apple juice. My dad came in and sat down at the table, a look of worry written across his face.

"What's wrong?" My mom asked.

"I don't know. It's probably nothing." He said as he picked up a newspaper and scanned the headlines. Mom and I exchanged looks. I shrugged and went back to my cartoons.

"Are you sure?" she asked again.

"Well, I don't know. A man I've never seen before was coming out of Ms. Green's house. I asked what he wanted, but he said he just had the wrong address. I found that sort of strange."

"It's probably just your spidey senses again, dad." I joked. That's what I always referred to dad's street smarts as, *spidey senses*.

"Yeah, maybe." He said, getting up from the table. "I'm going to go take a nap. I'll let the dog out later."

"Okay." Mom and I chorused, still working on our drawings.

An hour later, I heard the door slam from downstairs. Loud thumping noises echoed all through the house and frantic conversation took place between my parents. I heard some talk of calling the police and scrambling for the phone. I ventured down to the first floor to find out what all the commotion was about. My mom was standing by my dad as he clutched the receiver, wide-eyed and filled with panic.

"No," he said impatiently, "I think she's *inside the car*."

"*What does that mean?*" I asked myself. My mom sat down at the table, and so I sat by her. We listened for the next forty five minutes as my dad tried to convince the hotline that an elderly woman had just been kidnapped from her home on our block. The operators were skeptical. I heard a doubtful voice leak through the speakers, "Are you *sure* you know what you're talking about, sir?" I still couldn't figure out what was going on, and wanted nothing else but to find out. You could cut the tension in the room with a knife, and it was killing me.

My dad finally hung up the phone and ran his hands through his greying hair in angst. "Dad! What was that all about?" I shouted. He shook his head, sighing. "Yeah, what happened?" Mom asked.

I watched him take a deep breath before starting to explain. He described walking down the block, now for the second time that afternoon, and seeing Ms. Green's silver Mercedes roll out of her driveway. He found himself walking towards the car to say hello, until discovering that the woman driving the car was not Ms. Green. She was a woman he had never seen before, a young woman in her early thirties, who had not yet noticed him although he was staring at her. When she turned, her eyes met with his and froze, like a deer caught in headlights.

Seconds later, another car cruised slowly up the block. It was black, with scratches and paint splotches strewn across its doors. Through the shaded, dust coated windows, Dad could see the outline of a man in the driver's seat. As the car drew nearer, he recognized the driver as the strange man who showed up earlier in the day at Ms. Green's house. Dad did not stand around any longer. This whole situation was too strange for him, and he was not waiting around to find out firsthand what it was. He turned and ran back up the street and into the house to call the police. Mom and I knew the rest from there.

"What did you tell the operator?" I asked.

"I told them what I told you, and then I told them that I think they have Ms. Green inside that car."

"What?! Why do you think that?"

"I just get the sense." He answered, signalling that this was not the time for a lot of questions.

We sat for hours in silence and waited for news. I was still beyond confused, but even more nervous to find out what was *really* happening to Ms. Green. We all prayed that she was alright, and prayed harder that the police would get to her before she wasn't.

Later that night, we got a phone call. The police found a silver Mercedes parked on a small street just outside of town. A couple blocks over, a black Honda was found in front of an apartment building. Soon after, a message came through the station. It was Ms. Green. She was stranded in a small township and had no idea where to go or what to do. Several officers decided to raid the apartment building. Once the room was torn to pieces, mounds of stolen IDs and credit cards, valuable jewelry and handbags were found, all of which once belonged to older women. It seemed to the police that the man and woman who kidnapped Ms. Green made a career of preying on elderly widows. The pair was absent from the apartment, even though their cars were parked just outside. A squad set out to catch the both of them, and soon enough, they succeeded in their mission.

A few days later, my dad was called in to pick the criminals out of a lineup at the North Philly Prison. While he was out, some close neighbors, along with my mom and I, went to visit Ms. Green.

"I was just coming home from shopping." She sipped on ice water as she recalled the events from Sunday. "I pulled into my driveway, and stepped out of the car. When I went to get the groceries out of the trunk, I felt a heavy hand on my back. I was forced onto the floor of the backseat and blindfolded. I was yelling, but no one could hear me. I heard the doors slam shut and felt the car begin to move. For several long minutes, I lay absolutely still on the floor. The car finally pulled up and stopped abruptly. The doors flew open and I felt hands searching my pockets. 'Where's your wallet? Where are your cards?' A male voice hissed.

'No.' I refused. This was all I could manage.

He then grabbed me violently, pressing his fingertips into my arms. I felt another hand slap my head back.

'Get your hands off me!' I screamed. 'Get your hands off me now!' I was absolutely terrified, but I wasn't going to be treated so disrespectfully. I am a woman of dignity."

At this point, the room was completely silent. Ms. Green sipped on her water, and we all patiently waited for the rest of the story.

“Finally, the man gave up. He must have sensed that your dad knew what was going on and was aware of his limited time. He dumped me onto a street, still blindfolded. I heard the screech of tires and he was gone.” Ms. Green finished up her story, and then got up to fix herself another cup of iced water.

After saying our goodbyes and wishing Ms. Green well, Mom and I went home. I still couldn't believe that my dad somehow understood the danger of what was happening from the few small details that were presented. He came back shortly after we settled in the dining room and told us about what happened at the prison. He wasn't able to pick out the man in the lineup, but he could easily pick out the woman. He said he could never forget her face; that frozen look of shock, illuminated by a streetlamp above. My dad's involvement in the whole ordeal ended then, but lawyers were just getting started. Personal belongings were returned to victims and trials began. It seemed like everyone around me was ready to move on, but the impact that this event had on my childhood was permanent.

Up until that point, friends and family were able to convince me that Mount Airy was a place where bad things never happened and life was completely carefree. I found out through my own experiences that this was actually far from the truth. I still love Mount Airy and I don't feel unsafe living in my neighborhood like I did after this incident, but, like I said, the feeling of safety that I used to have about my home isn't there any more. As Cherry Valance said in *The Outsiders*, “It's tough all over.” Things happen everywhere. No one place in the world is free from the grasps of evil. Once this is accepted and understood, it is easier to appreciate the good that makes neighborhoods like Mount Airy amazing, instead of focusing on the lack of bad, which doesn't exist.