

Article Courtesy Town Crossings



Photo by Allegra Boverman

Yelena Ravvina, 11, (front) and her good friend Elana Roffer, 10 1/2, enjoyed their day off from school because of the snow storm. The girls are both glad to live in North Andover.

When a town becomes a home

By Gale Batsimm

Nine years ago, after becoming a stay-at-home mom, a working-mother friend and I were talking on the phone. We had been friends for years, back to our single days when we had both worked and lived near Boston, and had since both moved to North Andover.

"I'm going downtown," I told her.

"Boston?" she inquired.

”No, North Andover,” I responded. We laughed at how quickly my world had shrunk. A few years later, after she had also stopped work to care for her child, we had a similar telephone conversation.

”I have to go downtown,” she said.

”Boston?” I asked.

”No, North Andover,” she replied. How time had passed, and how motherhood, and a sense of home, had changed us.

For some people a town can seem like home immediately. For others it is a gradual process. Sometimes children or pets can make us feel a part of things. Other times it is a job, volunteer activity or neighborhood gathering that provides that sense of place.

Mohammad Yamin said he and his wife came to North Andover almost by accident. “I had been residing in temporary housing near my workplace in Chelmsford,” stated Yamin, who moved to the United States from Iran in 1984. Returning from Boston one late evening, Maryam and I lost our way, so we stopped to ask for directions to Chelmsford. Chance had brought us to the Super Stop & Shop on Route 114. For reasons hard to define, we had an impression of warmth and friendliness in this community, and this impression grew during subsequent stops and visits. When it came time to buy a home (in 2000), we chose to settle in North Andover. Over time and through community involvement such as my coaching youth soccer, North Andover has increasingly become home.”

Ironically, when he opened Nasym Oriental Rugs and Interiors in North Andover, he chose a location on Route 114, not far from where he and his wife had initially stopped. “I feel a sense of having established both family and professional roots in the community,” he said.

Joan Heafey has lived in North Andover since she was five or six years old. Her husband, John, grew up in town. The couple lived in South Lawrence for a few years early on. “As soon as we could afford to, it was back to good old North Andover and we never left,” said Heafey, who quickly corrects people who assume she lives in Andover. “Our kids grew up and went to school here. It was great because we usually knew their friends and the parents because a lot of them were products of the town. They would go to dances or sport events and the police officers on duty would make a point to let them know they knew who they were and ask about their parents and say hello for them. The comment was usually, ‘Geez, we can’t do anything around here that someone doesn’t know who we belong to.’ I would have to say that I have always considered North Andover my home and have been very proud to be part of it.”

While many of her friends are lifelong residents, Cheryl Means did not move to North Andover until 1994. “Our son was only nine months old, it was challenging,” she explained. “What do you do when your husband travels a lot and you’re home with a

baby? We were living at Royal Crest at the time. I happened to meet another mom who had just moved from out of state, too. She had done a lot of research. We quickly got involved in the Mother Connection and the Newcomers Club of the Andovers, which were great. Royal Crest had a group, too, which was good for networking.”

She said joining St. Paul’s Church and having her son begin kindergarten in town really made North Andover feel like home, though. “At that time I quickly became very involved on the PTO and School Council and as a Sunday school teacher,” she said. “For us, that is when we made some of our good friends and felt truly connected.”

Although she settled in town 15 years ago, when her son was 1 1/2 years old, Debbie Savoia gained a sense of belonging a few years later. “I don’t think I started feeling at home until I got involved in the Thomson School PTO,” she said. “It was such a great group of moms we had so many laughs. My big event of the month was going to PTO. I really looked forward to it.”

For 11-year-old Yelena Ravvina, North Andover was a far cry from home. “When I came here from Russia five years ago, I didn’t think that anybody would like me or understand me,” she said. “We moved into an apartment in North Andover. I didn’t know how to speak English at all. A few months later I was admitted into Bradstreet School. Of course, on my first day I was scared that I wouldn’t make any friends and nobody would understand me. To my surprise, the teachers were really nice and taught me to speak English. They also helped me make friends. Soon I had tons of friends, and that’s when I first started calling North Andover my home. Now I still live here in North Andover and still love it. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.”

In long-established North Andover neighborhoods, newcomers may be residents like Herb and Eleanor Sathan, who were still referred to as a new family on their block after 20 years. Now, after 31 years and with newer families on their street, they can claim some longevity.

Joining a local temple five years after moving to town and celebrating holidays locally gave Eleanor Sathan a sense of belonging. “We stopped going back to our parents for temple for the holidays; that’s when it really started to become home,” she said.

Jack Erle has grown children and grandchildren who live in town. He and his wife moved to North Andover in 1960, after residing in Methuen for four years. “They called North Andover ‘Turkey Town’,” he said. “It was a Yankee town. People were very aloof, they stuck to themselves. We probably didn’t feel at home for several years. North Andover was small then, maybe 11,000 people. Nobody ever invited you in their house. Now today everybody is friendly. It’s a much different town. We’ve lived here so long a lot of people know us, maybe that’s why it feels friendlier.”

Seeing familiar faces in unexpected places brings a smile to Suzie Riederer’s face. “It gives me a homey feeling running into people I know doing errands,” she said. “I’m from a big city (in Germany). When I run into people by accident, it makes me feel like I know

a lot of people.”

Having her son in the school system has also helped. She estimates it took three or four years to call North Andover home, but admits she still calls Germany home, too. After all, it’s not the house, but the people and warm memories that make a place or places -- home.

Gale Batsimm is a North Andover resident and a freelance writer. You can share information about your North Andover community by calling Town Crossings at (978) 475-7000 or e-mailing Gale at towncrossings@andovertownsman.com.