

Out in the Yard

Years ago on the comic TV show *Designing Women* two of the characters were looking for a man while grocery shopping and when one of them spotted some likely candidates, her friend demurred because they were obviously gay. How did she know? “Two men, fresh pasta, figure it out.”

That thought was in my mind the first time my partner and I started raking leaves in the front yard of our newly-purchased midcentury modern home in a sublimely quiet mid-Michigan neighborhood.

The work had to be done since we had lots of very mature trees: oak, maple, sassafras. But I wasn’t entirely out yet and the bucolic neighborhood was one where people strolled, walked their dogs, pushed strollers. There was a lot of foot traffic on our street and while I raked I could feel my shoulders tensing up from the imagined stares or frowns.

Boy, was I wrong. The very first comment we got was from an elderly woman who actually crossed from the house opposite us and thanked us. “The people who had the house before you never raked their damned leaves and they always blew onto my lawn!”

Much more followed because we weren’t just taking care of the yard, we were having overgrown (and unattractive) old hedges and arbor vitae removed because they were obscuring the lines of the pretty house. We were also planting shrubs ourselves that a gardening friend suggested would both look good and not require a tremendous amount of care, things like lovely Blue Star Junipers.

One passer-by after another stopped to chat with us when we were out to compliment us on how much better our house was looking. That’s when it hit me that nobody cared if we were gay: what they cared about was property values and by upgrading, we were making our house and theirs more salubrious and saleable.

My fear was totally unfounded. If they had any negative feelings about gay people at all, I doubt they would have stopped to talk to us. Raking and planting broke the ice and started to make us feel truly at home. And then once we got a dog and started walking him together, our social connections in the neighborhood were truly established and we knew we’d be living there for a very long time.