

Larry & Janet Colfer, Heygate Residents 1974 - 2009



We were among the first to move on to the estate in 1973. It was lovely, we knew all our neighbours and everybody was friendly. We had 5 children; they were all friends with the other kids on the estate. Enid's children grew up with mine as well so it was a real community. Larry's sister lived opposite and his other sister lived in the Kingshill block. His mum when she was alive first lived in the Claydon block, then she moved to the sheltered housing in Kingshill. So it was a real community: nearly everyone knew everyone else; you weren't in each others pockets but you knew people.

Then eventually towards the end I think they just ran it down into disrepair. People moved out, other people moved in and gradually you lost that community feeling. It's very sad. We've all been made to move away so we're hardly going to see anyone now.

My close friend she lived in the block opposite and she died last year of cancer; she never even got round to moving. She was so stressed about the fact of moving and I don't think it helped really. It's so sad when you lose the sense of community in a place it really is.

Some people look at the place and say its a dump. but it wasn't a dump when we moved here. Compared to what we lived in before: when you think about Munton Road. I mean some people said the old buildings were better, but washing in a sink? with a scrubbing board? You don't want to go backwards you want to go forwards!

We considered ourselves very fortunate to have a place like this, and we are sad about leaving it. It's a concrete jungle to some people, but when I looked out of my kitchen window when I was busy washing I could see all the pink blossoms. It was like being in the country when you look out of your window. So it has never been a concrete jungle to me.

Finding a new place has been a terrible, stressful nightmare. Because when you bid for a place you're bidding against the whole of the borough, plus there are about 300 people on the estate here, and for the best flats in the book you had about 200 people bidding for them. Then when you phone up you're number one on the list, but you look an hour later and you're number 5 or number 27 - it's a real waste of time. The first 3 people get the chance of viewing the flat and refusing it. We were number 170 one time! Then they came and offered us a property and said this is your final offer. We received a threatening letter and we had only been offered one place. We were entitled to view three properties and they only offered us one and said you will have to take it, this is your final offer.

It was in Peckham right near a main road and with damp, cracks in the walls and mildew. It was very small and we wouldn't have been able to take anything with us.

None of us in the maisonettes wanted to move. You can't blame people that lived in the tall blocks when the lifts started breaking down etc. The people living in the tall blocks they were shut off. My sister lived over in Kingshill. She was living on the 11th floor and had no lift for 18 months because the council refused to repair the lift. You imagine bringing your shopping up 11 floors. There's an old dear in kingshill and she has had no lifts for ages. She only goes out once a week and then she only gets a few bits because she can't carry it up the stairs. Half a day to get up and down the 11 floors of stairs when you're old.

When they did the survey about people wanting to move off the Heygate, they only did the survey of the people living in the tower blocks. Nobody ever came to us in the maisonettes and asked if we wanted to move. Of course they're going to have the overall vote, because you get more people in the tower block but none of us in the maisonettes wanted to move. Larry's sister opposite was in tears and all. She really didn't want to move. It has really affected us. Everybody here looked after their own backgrass and the neighbours. Everybody used to be out the back garden, talking to each other. We had Len next door, Mrs Hayes down below. Flo used to shout over to me from the window. It was a lovely community, and now its sad cos we have all been scattered.

We were annoyed about what Michael Caine said. He made a film here[Harry Brown]. He said it has always been a slum, but he didn't live here - he never even lived in the area.

To knock it that they were slums and that the children would never come to anything living on places like this. I have got five children, one of them is a pharmacist, another one is an engineer, another is a mechanic, Sarah's been through university. My children came to something. So what right does Michael Caine have to say children won't amount to anything on this estate.



I think the new places will be for city people: people that can afford it, but I don't think we'll live long enough to see.

The truth is that's probably why the community as it was liked this area: because it was central to everything; you had all your shops, the tubes, the trains the buses. We didn't have to go far for anything.

I think it'll be 2020 before there will be anything built here. I think the bones will be stripped by then and I think we'll all be gone by then.

I would like to see what they've done with it but our children will see it, not us. We'll be pushing up the daisies by then.