On Ninth Street between Elm and Cedar in a certain midwestern city, there are more odd and fascinating people than you would find in any movie. Among these are an Eskimo, the “richest man in Indiana,” a replica of Baba Yaga, a woman with a notable collection of Currier and Ives prints, the mother of a famous journalist, a former aviator who won in World War II every decoration a pilot can win, and a champion pigeon-raiser. Although the pigeon-raiser does not live on my street, I count him because his pigeons do.

Perhaps the most unusual neighbor is Anauta, who comes from the Baffin Islands. Interviewed and photographed wherever she goes, she has lectured all over the United States. In the heat of summer or the dead of winter, her fur and beaded costumes can be seen flapping from the clothesline when she returns from a lecturing tour. Although when Anauta came to this country with two of her children she did not know a word of English, she has written two books which have won several literary prizes. The most recent has been put into Braille. This small, wiry, energetic woman with white hair and dancing eyes doesn’t know her own age because, she explains, the Eskimos have no way of telling time.

Anauta’s late husband, a Britisher from Nova Scotia, collected odd mediums of exchange from all over the world. Hummingbirds’ wings made into a rope, tea molded in slabs, and copper drums are just a few of his oddities. An article in the Star Magazine called him “the richest man in Indiana,” and after his collection was rated as one of the ten best in the world, he built a burglar- and fire-proof vault to house it.

A neighbor who might have served as a model for the Russian witch, Baba Yaga, is Mrs. Vernoff. Deaf, bent, talking incoherently in a mixture of Russian and English, easily enraged by children running over her lawn or people parking their cars in front of her house, she would have certainly been judged a witch in early Salem. Although the children today call her a witch, none of us is alarmed to see Mrs. Vernoff cautiously open our back porch door, click down a tin can, peer around, and scuttle away. We know she is just leaving a can of bones, tenderly saved until they are moldy, for Girl, our English setter.

When visiting Mrs. O’Hara, a queer, dried-up little old lady next door to Mrs. Vernoff, you notice the many scraps of paper pinned on her blouse like medals on a general. These are notes to herself reminding her that the water is on to boil, the meat is cooking, or the light, which she intended to turn off, is burning in the basement.
As she proudly displays her collection of Currier and Ives prints, the familiar odor of burning meat will slowly pervade the room. She has forgotten to look at her notes.

Mrs. Sunderland, another neighbor, is the mother of a noted journalist. She laments that since she is growing deaf she never knows what is going on in the neighborhood. However, recently she complained that the people across the street left their radio on too late at night, and she is always the first to know the neighborhood gossip and the first to pass it on. Her son must have inherited a "nose for news" from his mother.

The former aviator, who never displays his many medals, can often be seen with his five-year-old son looking skyward at the planes overhead. When asked, "Will you fly again?" he always answers, "Never!"

Whenever fresh grass seed is scattered on our scanty lawn, the pigeons from the next street flutter over. With a swoosh of pretty wings, they alight for a feast. Their owner comes over to watch. "They are very fond of seeds," he says cheerfully.

**My Retreat**

Diane Shoemaker

Ramp Creek blends into Big Walnut and into the Wabash and the Ohio and the Mississippi, but the Ramp Creek I know is the gentle stream that slips over the miniature waterfall in the valley below my hideout. Silent oaks tack in the selvage of the moss to prevent its slipping over the steep bank into the stream below, forming a growing, living shield around my refuge. Here in this place do I come to philosophize and to dream.

Often I travel the dusty trail through the meadow, wade across the bubbling branch, and climb up and around the long slope that leads to the far side of my hideout. I lie on my stomach in the green, elastic moss and learn about patience from an ant exploring his way through the labyrinth of grass and bent twigs and crispy leaves that obstruct his journey. I lie on my back in the green, cool moss and learn of eternity from clouds that have been mist, rain, snow, fog, and sleet an infinite number of times. Smelling the scent of clover on the wind, I realize that as the fragrance has hitched a ride on the breeze, so must I sometime seek the assistance and guidance of a greater Force to obtain perpetual happiness. I see a snake slither across the damp sand to sun on a fallen log. And seeing this creature...