

I spent the first 10 years that i remember, in the same apartment, on the same street, in Montreal. I had friends all around: in the house on the left, the house on the right, the houses behind, the houses across the street, and more.

Most neighbours on that street were quite friendly except for one. But it was not one person, it was one household.

For as long as i remember, the “Italians” were source of trouble and mischief. I just remember that one was called Gracia, but otherwise, i didn’t know any of their names. (this has nothing to do with discrimination but they happened to be the only Italian family in the neighbourhood, which is probably why they were identified as such).

A full house

On that street, most dwellings were side by side duplex. That family took a whole side, using the two (or maybe three) apartments of that side. They were a family of 7 women (no children). There was a grandma among them and she used to smile to the kids around but she never talked to us. In fact, most of them never talked to anyone in the neighbourhood except to yell and complain (and scare us, kids).

An old law

Whatever they could do to cause trouble, it seems they did it. One obsolete law in that area was that a car was not allowed to be parked on the street for more than two consecutive hours. Well, in a residential neighbourhood with only one garage for 2 or 3 families, can you imagine following that law overnight? Where would you keep your car? But that still was a law and Gracia knew about it so when she was upset at someone (and that was often), she would call the police late in the evening, complaining that vehicles were parked too long on the street.

And down came the cops

Following a complaint, the officers HAD to come by and enforce the law. How could they know that a vehicle had been parked in the same place for more than 2 hours? Their trick was simple: they would draw a line with a white chalk on the pavement right behind one tire. They would do that for a certain number of vehicles around her dwelling. Then, they would come back 2 hours later and see which vehicle still had the chalk mark in the same

place

Neighbourhood watch

Lucky for the “good” neighbours, many people worked at various hours and some of them would come home later than others, and mostly, later than the first police officers’ visit. If one person noticed the chalk mark behind any vehicle, that person would phone all the other neighbours who would immediately go to their car, start it, and back it about 6 inches, just enough to cover the mark! And everyone was saved from a parking ticket!

Cops are friends

Gracia had called the police so often over this (and many other issues) that the officers actually became friends with most families in the neighbourhood. I even remember one night when they came at our place and had a chat and a coffee!

That household has caused so much trouble that they had become a legend, and i am sure some stories about them are unfounded, but as kids, we probably believed them.

Do you want more stories about the “Italians”? Listen to Debbie Hodge’s podcast later this week. I will relate a few more fun stories about them.

How about you? Did you ever have bad or simply odd neighbours? Did you ever hear of some silly disputes between neighbours? Share your stories in the comments below.