Describe the places you've lived

I have previously described the house I lived in from birth. At the age of 19, my mother moved us from that house to an apartment on North Main Street in Lodi. It was the second floor of a garden apartment building alongside the Saddle River.
The move took place while I was away at college. My grandfather was remarrying, and he told my mother that she would have to move from the first floor where she had lived for the 24 years since she married my father. She had to move upstairs to a one-bedroom apartment where my grandfather lived because his new wife didn’t want to climb the stairs. He told her that my brother and I could sleep in the attic.
My mother was already angry that my grandfather had started charging her rent after my father died. So when she was being evicted from her longtime home, it was an easy decision for her. She would find us a new place to live. She asked my father’s cousin, Larry Santaloci (who worked in real estate as a side hustle along with his main gig, his food truck) to find her an apartment she could afford. He did what she asked.
The apartment was a standard one in the 1970s. It had a small living room/dining room and an even smaller kitchen. It had a bathroom and two small bedrooms. It was a lot less living space than we had had at Church Street and of course there was no yard, just a parking lot. The only green was the water of the Saddle River that flowed about 20 feet from our apartment.
In truth, the only thing really wrong with the apartment was its location. And the problem with the location was that the Saddle River overflowed its banks on a regular basis. In fact, my first view of the apartment was when I arrived home from college for Christmas break and had to wade through waist-deep water to get to the door. Whenever it rained, my mother would have to keep looking out the window to see how high the water was. I remember hearing her say things like “I have to move the car. The water is halfway up the hubcaps.”
So as soon as I graduated and got my first job in June 1975, I started looking for a new apartment. I found one on Bergen Turnpike in Ridgefield Park in August, and we moved on Labor Day weekend.
The Ridgefield Park apartment was quite an improvement in size. Ironically, it too was on the second floor and alongside a river, this time the Overpeck Creek. But the creek never rose the entire time we lived there. And even if it had, we were about 50 yards away. Our living room window looked out on not only the creek, but also the Meadowlands. It was a comfortable apartment. In fact, my mother lived there until she remarried. I moved out in 1978 when I got married.
By this time, I was working in Nyack, New York and so I naturally looked for an apartment in Rockland County. I was encouraged to look for a condominium unit rather than an apartment to build equity toward a down payment on a house. As it turned out, just at that moment Rockland was undergoing a building boom with lots of condominiums to choose from. I found three that looked promising. One weekend, my soon-to-be-wife Pat came up from Barrington and we looked at all three. We settled on a unit in Germonds Village in Bardonia. It was an end unit that faced Route 304. However, the unit was far enough away from the highway that road noise was not an issue. There was a bus to New York City nearby and it was just a 15-minute drive to my office.
It was a one-bedroom apartment with a nice-sized living room/dining room and kitchen. We bought a stackable washer/dryer that we put in the kitchen. That would later make the unit easier to sell. There was a glass door that led outside to a porch where I had a grill. There was a beautiful in-ground swimming pool that all residents could use. And for the first time since 1972, I was living on the ground floor.
We always viewed the condo as a stepping stone to buying a house. And so in 1980 we began to look for houses. We looked all over Rockland County and didn’t see anything we liked until the real estate agent asked us if we were open to living at the far western side of Rockland, near the border of Orange County. We said we were willing to take a look. The first home she showed us was a wonderful four-bedroom ranch home on a hill with a garage, a fireplace, a finished basement including a wet bar, and a deck in the back. The house was just 13 years old. It was on Torne Road in a community called Sloatsburg, that at the time felt almost rural, certainly exurban. We were just a mile from Harriman State Park, and we regularly had deer in our yard. There were trees all around us and a lake for swimming. We had wonderful neighbors across the street who often helped out a young couple who needed help with their first house.
The downside of all this wonderful nature around us is the distance we were not only from our families and jobs but also from things like supermarkets, schools and hospitals. Pat was working in New York City by this time, and I was in law school there. Sloatsburg was more than 30 miles from New York. Living in Sloatsburg frequently felt like living in the wilderness in the middle of nowhere. So when I graduated from law school and was looking for a job, we naturally looked south to New Jersey where our families were.
    I found my first law job in Paramus, New Jersey. We had to move quickly because the Sloatsburg house had sold faster than we expected, and in any case, I was now working long hours in New Jersey, and it was a long commute back to Rockland County. So we found a one-bedroom apartment on Anderson Street in Hackensack as a stopgap. We moved in in February 1984.
It was on the sixth floor of a mid-rise apartment building just up the block from the train station and downtown Hackensack. The most memorable thing about this apartment was that it was carpeted throughout, even in the bathroom, which featured a white shag carpet. Because it was on the top floor of the building, it was intolerably hot in the summer. We ran the air conditioner day and night until it actually frosted up. The apartment was large, but much of it was covered with boxes from our Sloatsburg house. We never unpacked those boxes because we moved in six months to a one-bedroom apartment in the same building in Ridgefield Park where I had lived earlier. My mother was gone by now and the building had become a co-op.
The Ridgefield Park co-op where we moved in September 1984 was also seen as a stepping stone to eventually getting back in a house. It was similar to the apartment I had lived in with my mother and its familiarity was its attraction. We actually loved living there. The bus to NYC was at the front door. I was now working in Englewood Cliffs and that was short commute. But then Pat became pregnant with David and there was no way we could stay in a one-bedroom apartment with a baby. So we went to a real estate agent in Ridgefield Park with the idea of finding a house there because we liked the town very much. She showed us house after house in our price range and they were all old and needed work. We knew from our experience in Sloatsburg that we were not skilled enough to maintain an old house.
It was then that Pat said: “what about Clifton where your grandmother lives?”. Pat had always liked the area when we went there for Christmas Eve every year. As it turned out, the real estate agent had a friend who was a real estate agent in Clifton, and he took us to Cathay Road in an area as far away from my grandparents’ house as you could get and still be in Clifton. We both liked the house and the neighborhood, and the price was affordable.
It was an old house like the ones in Ridgefield Park, but it had been well-maintained and didn’t seem to need any immediate work. That and the fact that we were tired of looking at houses, and the clock was ticking on the arrival of the baby, led us to pay the full asking price. We never even looked at another house in Clifton. We moved in amidst Hurricane Gloria in October 1985. This was the fourth place we had lived in less than two years.
The house was much smaller than our house in Sloatsburg, but its location was much better. It had three bedrooms upstairs, although the third bedroom was absolutely tiny. Luckily it had a fourth bedroom downstairs. It had two bathrooms and a basement that was finished on one side. There was a rug in the kitchen, but we pulled it up and replaced it with linoleum. The house was paneled throughout. It had a stand-alone garage and a small backyard. Probably the best thing about the house was the neighborhood. There were lots of great neighbors who we got to know in the 13 years we lived there.
In November 1997 I got a legal publishing job in Pennington, New Jersey, and so we began looking at houses in that area. The houses and the area were nice, but the prices were high. On top of that, the kids were not happy about leaving their friends and their school and the only place they had ever lived. By spring 1998, I could see that the job in Pennington would not be a long-term one for me. I needed to get back into private law practice, which I had left in 1991. I decided against a move to Pennington and everyone seemed relieved.
But since we were outgrowing the Cathay Road house, and we had all gotten into the idea that we were moving anyway, I suggested we just look for a bigger house in Clifton. We quickly found a house a mile away on St. Philip’s Drive, across the street from our school and church. That house was a step up from Cathay Road in size and features. First, it was larger. It had a kitchen as large as I had had on Church Street growing up. The downstairs family room was great. The house had three bathrooms and four bedrooms. I used the spare bedroom as an office. It had an attached garage that we used for storage. The location was even better than the Cathay Road house, with school and church across the street and routes 3 and 46 visible from our kitchen window. We stayed in that house for 21 years.
Finally, in 2019 as I contemplated retirement, we put the St. Philip’s Drive house on the market, and it quickly sold. We found an apartment in neighboring Montclair, where we had always wanted to live, but thought we could never afford. The apartment provides all the living space we need over three floors with two bedrooms and two bathrooms. But the real reason to live on Gates Drive is the location. We are within walking distance of downtown Montclair and its restaurants, movie theater, concert venue, library, art museum and doctors. We don’t have a house anymore, but we do have a garage and a yard with a patio. So we’re good for a while. Of course, since it’s an apartment, the rent could rise out of our reach in the future. But for now, it’s a great place to live.