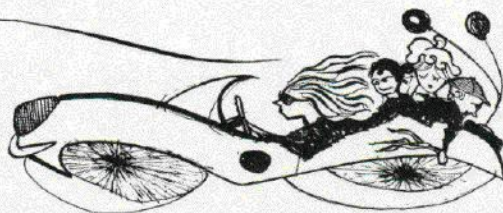
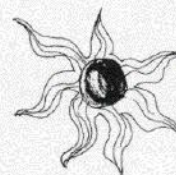


GENESIS OF RESTON



By Robert E. Simon, Jr.

I was brought up in New York and loved the countryside. As soon as my first wife and I had a child and one on the way, we decided to move to the country. We found the perfect place—five acres of woodland with a little field out on Long Island. One next-door neighbor had 100 acres; several others had a couple of acres each; the next nearest neighbor owned 1,050 acres. It was, we thought, the American Dream. But once we began living our dream, there were troubles. My wife found herself becoming a chauffeur and it was quite difficult for the children to get together with their friends. Furthermore, it was almost four years before I was able to swim and play tennis and ice-skate and boat. I had to find out where the clubs were, who belonged to them, get elected and all that. With these problems solved, only one minor difficulty remained: the swimming pool was over 15 miles from the tennis court.

As you can imagine, we used to go out driving quite a bit. Often we would drive through Levittown and remark, as everyone is always remarking, "Isn't this horrible! Isn't this awful!" But after a while we began to notice that children were swarming all over the place and that our children would look out of the car window with a longing glance. Soon we began to feel that perhaps in many respects this was better than our American Dream. So we moved to Syosset, a Long Island suburb.

Syosset is a place where couples come, have children and leave as soon as the children have grown up. Because the entire working population commuted to the city, social life was restricted to

the weekends. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I would get home at 7 or 8 o'clock, worn out and tired. On the weekends, however, it was pandemonium, with the cocktail parties, dinners and other functions. This wasn't so marvelous, either. As for commuting, we were lucky because we were only four minutes from the railroad station. It took me only an hour and five minutes each way.

When I was 21 my father died and I went into his office. One of my jobs was to run Carnegie Hall. My father and a group of friends had bought it in 1925, expecting that the new concert hall would be built any day and the old one torn down. I got more experience than I bargained for because the new hall wasn't built until 1960. One thing I learned from this project was that 75 per cent of the people who had studios in Carnegie Hall also lived near there. This was quite a contrast to my one-hour, five-minute commute.

I next became interested in regional shopping centers. As a solution to the problem of providing convenient, efficient shopping facilities, they were a disillusionment. They are not as convenient as they are supposed to be. You have to walk a mile, or even two miles, on an average shopping trip. And a regional shopping center makes a poor neighbor in any residential area because of the parking space required.

I learned one other important thing during those years. I was involved in a housing project for less fortunate people at a time when most students and thinkers thought that good housing was the answer to society's ills. If people were brought out of the slums and given a good place to live, everything would change. Although Jane Jacobs' book, "The Death and Life of American Cities," has its shortcomings, I think its conclusion is correct: that housing, by itself, does not accomplish very much, that it is not a panacea.

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This brings me to 1961. A representative of the Washington real-estate firm of Shannon & Luchs was given the assignment to sell a 6,750-acre parcel of Virginia countryside. He spoke to Jim Lannegan in New York, hoping to interest Roger Stevens, but instead Jim called a friend of his, Henry Wrightson. "Henry, do you know anybody that is interested in 6,000-odd acres in Virginia?" Henry replied, "Maybe, if you come on up and see me." The person he had in mind, of course, was me.

The project was really out of my area, but it seemed such a marvelous opportunity. The location was perfect. The foundations were just being laid for the magnificent Dulles Airport terminal building and construction crews were scratching away at the runways. An airport like that in what seems like a desert will cause the desert to flower. And Dulles Airport was being put into Fairfax County, then the single, fastest-growing county in the United States. The property was about 18 miles from Washington the nation's capital and fastest-growing metropolitan area in the country. On top of this, the terrain was beautiful. It was an irresistible challenge, so I didn't resist.

What should be done with the land? With a parcel this size, the only conceivable single use was a bedroom community; and that, to me, was a repulsive idea. We began to think about a "New Town." Of the many definitions of a New Town, I prefer the one given by Ada Louise Huxtable in the New York Times: a New Town is a large-scale development with residential, commercial, industrial, cultural and civic functions. In other words, a well-rounded community.

Once the decision was made to build a New Town, the question was how to proceed. First I needed to get the assistance of various types of people. We decided that it would be a mistake to try to build an inhouse staff to handle all aspects of the project. Instead, we would work with consultants. We needed a diversity of skills and talents and hoped for a higher level of ability than we could afford on a full-time basis. We used, at one time or another, more than 50 different consulting firms.

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to accept a set of goals which make the direction explicit and, at the same time, function as a guide for its realization. From these goals comes a program; from the program, the plans; and from the plans, the buildings, landscaping, and so forth, that comprise the new community.

Because so many people were skeptical about apartments over stores and high-rise buildings and townhouses in the country, we hedged our bets. We started in two places simultaneously: a more conventional approach in Hunters Woods with single-family homes and an experiment in new ideas of living in Lake Anne Village.

The gradual development of Reston was a continual process of learning. We learned, above all, from the pioneer residents, who told us about the mistakes we made.

There are indications Reston's development got started on the right track. For example, 20 per cent of the people who bought into the first clusters of townhouses were single. We didn't expect this to happen at all. It means that right from the outset people were thinking of Reston as a city rather than as a suburb where the typical family which moves in is made up of a husband 29 years old, a wife 26 years old, two and one half children and a parakeet.

Another example: the industrial program at its outset went much better than we thought it would. The first industrial customers came to us before there were roads, sewers, or water lines, when Reston still looked like Virginia countryside. Soon there was a strong demand for industrial space. Albert Mayer, who was connected with Radburn, wrote me a letter saying, "Congratulations. You are the first New Town to get industry at its inception." This pleased us very much.

My last straw in the wind is rather touching. Mrs. Dorothy Bearman, who used to run the nursery school, once asked the children to draw a picture of what Reston was to them. To Mrs. Bearman's surprise, many of the pictures had fathers in them. Her interpretation was that, for some reason or other--the facilities, the atmosphere, the walkways--Reston children were getting a better deal on Daddy's time.