

# Uprooted

The City of Calgary is closing Midfield Mobile Home Park at the end of the month. For the residents, the decision marks the end of a long struggle and a vibrant community.

A PHOTO ESSAY BY GEORGE WEBBER

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The people of Midfield Mobile Home Park fought city hall. City hall won; eviction day is Sept. 30, in keeping with a city council decision to close the park. After more than a decade of battling to keep their neighbourhood intact, residents are scattering every which way: Capitol Hill, Shawnessy, Torrington, Airdrie, Medicine Hat.

"It was a good, close community," said Gary Murphy, a colourful Maritimer who lived at Midfield for 35 years. "We're all low-income. We're all in the same boat. No one's rich. If anybody got money, they're out." Murphy moved to Calgary from Nova Scotia in his 20s to work as a welder. He speaks of his white-and-blue trailer of mid-'70s vintage with the same affection a sailor has for a weather-worn ship: "She ain't much at all, but she's home. That's all you can say. She leaks a lot of cold air in the winter, and in summertime, the old tin can gets a-cookin'." Like other Midfield residents, Murphy owns his trailer but pays monthly rent to the Calgary Housing Company, a city subsidiary, for his trailer pad.

Located at 954 16th Ave. N.E., the 183-lot park overlooks Deerfoot Trail, Nose Creek and verdant golf courses in the valley below. It's by the crossroads of Calgary's two major highways, close to downtown and amenities like schools, stores, and transit. "Prime land," said Murphy. "I can see why they want it." The city owns the property and says it is shutting the park due to its aging water and sewer infrastructure. Originally the city promised to build a new park on the city's eastern outskirts and relocate people there. Then council decided not to build a new park at all, leaving people here feeling even more betrayed.

Ken Brohman, left, and Gary Murphy

in Brohman's trailer, which he bought in the early 1980s after seeing a newspaper advertisement for Midfield.





Murphy and his neighbours got the letter announcing Midfield's closure in May 2014, but it's not as simple as picking up and moving their trailers to a new park. Vacancies are few, most parks don't accept old trailers and many of the Midfield trailers wouldn't survive a move anyway. People are caught in a bind, with some moving into other Calgary Housing units, and others leaving town altogether. "Everybody's running like rabbits," Murphy said. He's been busy helping his neighbours move, loading couches and tables into trucks. He himself is destined for a basement suite near SAIT. He calls it "the bunker."

Most people have already left. The evening before Ken Brohman demolished his trailer in early September, he sat at his kitchen table sharing beers with his friend Jack. Brohman recounted how he bought his place 36 years ago after seeing an ad in the *Calgary Sun*, moving in with just a desk and a shelf. He was matter-of-fact about the end. "I've already patted it on the wall and said, 'You've been a good house for a long time. I'm sorry I gotta do this, but I've got no choice.'"

Midfield residents are getting \$10,000 from the city as a "tenant closure payment," plus up to \$10,000 to cover the cost of removing trailers. "It's a slap in the face," said Brohman, who works as a maintenance manager for a commercial building. "I bought this place for \$20,000 and put at least another \$20,000 into it." The financials sting plenty, but so does losing the entire social structure of a neighbourhood. "I'll be sitting in some stuffy little apartment up on the fourth floor with none of my friends dropping by out of the blue like they used to," Brohman said.

Others, like Naomi Anderson, left their trailers behind to be demolished. "We actually went back and saw the empty lot," said Anderson, a mom of three whose kids grew up at Midfield. "It put everybody back into tears. It was bad. My kids are still trying to figure out why anybody would let that happen." Anderson's kids attended nearby Mount View School, which was close enough that they could walk. Many of their friends lived at Midfield. Now they're at a new school



**Gary Larratt**

"It was my forever home," says Larratt, pictured on the porch of his mobile home. **Top to bottom at right:** Erna Reinhard in her light-filled home, Fred Jackson walking his dog, and Ken Brohman.





after Anderson found a rental place in Airdrie. “As much as I’d like to stay and fight, I have kids,” she said. “I want them to stand up for what is right, but it would just be silly for us to stay. It wouldn’t be fair to them.”

Seniors, families, veterans, lifelong Calgarians—they’ve all had to leave. Rudy Prediger, however, plans to stay to the bitter end. He’s 82 years old, and is Midfield’s resident community organizer. A retired trucker who has lived at the park for 47 years, Prediger has fought rent increases in the past and he’s fighting eviction now. “At least if I wind up getting booted out of here, I can say I did what I could,” he said. “When somebody’s getting an injustice, I’ll go to bat for them.” He still tends his flower garden out front.

Some aren’t moving far, but it feels like a world away. “You’re getting your life ripped from you,” said Gary Larratt, a semi-retired mechanic who lived on the park’s eastern edge with his daughter. He’s moving into a townhouse just across the Deerfoot in Vista Heights. Sitting on his Midfield porch, surrounded by screwdrivers, pliers and other tools of his trade, he explained how he planned to spend his retirement at the park. “It was my forever home,” he said with a twinkling eye. His was a fine view, overlooking the Nose Creek valley below. It wasn’t unusual for Larratt to spot wildlife like deer and coyotes just outside his front door. In winter, he’d run his snow blower along the crest of the hill so his neighbours had a path to walk their dogs. “The city is holding the gun to us,” he said. “Clipping my wings, putting me in a smaller place and taking away my future. My future was not great by any means, but it was mine.”

A few days after I met Brohman, I went back to check on his place. To my right, down the slope at the Winston Golf Club (18 holes, \$98), the well-to-do played on immaculate fairways, their clubs glinting in the sunlight. To my left, Brohman’s trailer lay in a heap, just as he’d planned. I’d asked him earlier what he’d miss most about Midfield. He didn’t have to think about it for long: “Just the sense of home.” ☹



### Rudy Prediger

“When somebody’s getting an injustice, I’ll go to bat for them,” says Prediger, Midfield’s longtime community organizer. Top to bottom at right: Desmond Buttle and his son Brandon, Fred Jackson, and Alain Langis.





**Naomi Anderson**

"My kids are still trying to figure out why anybody would let that happen," says Anderson, pictured with her children Vaughn and Chloe. Next page, clockwise from top right: Gary Murphy has lived at Midfield for 35 years, Yves Drouin soaks up the sun alongside his plants, and Jerry Gammell's home reveals his organizational talents.

