

Voices of Independence: What Led Each of Us to Independence?

By Cheri Battrick | May 1, 2026



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Each community has a unique identity based on location, infrastructure, history, population demographics, and the goals of the people. So, what is the identity of Independence, Missouri?

Some might say that it is a small suburban bedroom community adjacent to the bustling metropolis of Kansas City. But is that all it is? And are those of us who live here merely residents for a time, passing through on our way to something better, something more important, something ...more? Or are we here for the long haul?

My husband and I have lived here for nearly ten years. During this time, we have learned a lot about what Independence is and what it has been. But we have also learned that it is up to all of us to decide what Independence will be.

Each of us has our own little space we call home. It may be a small starter home in an older neighborhood, a balconied apartment in a high rise building, a mobile home in a trailer court, or a mansion on a hill. Some of us are trying to figure out where to call home while sleeping in shelters—or the safest place we can find.

Our predecessors left us a colorful history to build upon. In the 1800s, Independence was a small town on the western frontier of the United States. Rough characters lived here, toughened by the circumstances which led them west, and even farther west. There were conflicts that resulted in some of the citizens being ousted for their religious beliefs. And there were dreams that led others through the adjacent Indian territory onward to California, Oregon, and Santa Fe.

I am one who believes that while Independence was just an outpost in the past—a stopping point along the way to somewhere else—its future is right here. And I'm guessing that many of you feel the same.

Why?

Because living in rural America is becoming the goal. People are moving from the expensive hustle and bustle of coastal regions and cement cities to find peace, a slower pace of life, a neighborhood where they can safely walk, jog, or just sit on the porch in the twilight of an evening. They want to know their neighbors and the local store owners. They want connection more than instant gratification. They want to create something for their children and grandchildren and beyond.

Since moving here, I have met many people who feel that they have been brought here by Divine Providence. And I am one of those.

I grew up four miles from the beach in sunny Southern California. But I too wanted something more. Something different than I had known. I dreamed of having a larger piece of property. Perhaps with a creek and large shade trees. I dreamed of being a writer—and of making a difference with that writing. And I was looking for a place where I could put down roots and stay not just for a time, but forever.

As a young girl in the 1990s, I had lots of dreams. One of them was the dream of having a large family of children—six, to be exact. And I dreamed of raising them in a happy, simple home, much like children were raised in the 1950s.

One day, while visiting a bookstore in Orange, California, I spied a greeting card that captured my attention. The image on the front was a beautiful golden-toned, 1950s-era kitchen with wide double-hung windows over the sink. Six children, boys and girls, lined up

from tallest to shortest, were marching through the kitchen. They were wearing folded newspaper hats and banging on pots and pans as they went. Instantly I seemed to know—or hope—that this image was my destiny.

I bought the card and kept it for many years. Over time, in one of the various moves I later made, it was lost. But that image lives on in my mind.

I was never able to have children of my own, although for a short time I was a foster mom to teenage boys who brought me great joy. And my career path took me in a different direction too. Instead of being a writer who made a difference, I was a secretary, a personnel director, a case manager, and an administrative assistant. In those positions I used writing as a tool for documentation, procedures, manuals, and creating community education programs.

Sometimes life goes like that, doesn't it? The best laid plans often get lost in the shuffle of making a living, of learning and growing, and sometimes of just surviving.

But like others in this community, I was eventually brought here by a spiritual prompting, and a subsequent job transfer. I had never anticipated living in Independence, but one day while riding back to the office with my new co-workers, an odd feeling came over me. It was like God said to me, "You're here!"

I remember turning quickly to the left to look out the window of the back seat and seeing the spire of the Community of Christ Temple. Stunned, I whispered back to that voice, "You want me *here*?"

At the time I was looking for a home for my husband and me. He was out west packing up our belongings to load in a U-Haul truck while I was getting my feet under me in my latest administrative position. That day after work, I drove back up River Boulevard from my new office to the spot where that impression had come. There was a home for sale on the west side of the street, and I quickly parked and called the number on the for-sale sign.

The realtor kindly told me that the house was under contract. Closing was due to happen the next day. I asked for an update on whether the sale went through. Two days later the call came. That house was sold.

My heart stopped for a moment, but I *knew*. I was meant to be here, to live in Independence. It was so clear to me that after work, I again drove to the now-sold house, parked in front, and prayed.

"Heavenly Father," I began, "this is where you told me you wanted me. But this house has sold. I can only guess that the house you *really* have for us is somewhere nearby. Please help me find it. Which direction is it from here?"

I didn't have to wait long, for an almost-immediate impression came: Southwest.

I drove from River to Lexington, then turned right and drove around the curve. Not seeing any homes for sale, I turned right at Walnut and slowly went down the hill.

What is that in the distance? In the glow of the late afternoon sun, I could barely make it out. *Is that a for-sale sign?*

As I approached, it was as though someone I could not see grabbed the steering wheel and turned the car into the driveway. I had to stomp on the brake to keep from going through the garage door.

Yes, it was a house for sale. I called the realtor, Rhonda Farrell, who told me all about it. She didn't use the word "vintage," but she did say the house was unique. We made an appointment to meet several days later when she could fit me into her schedule, and I waited impatiently to see where God was going to plant us.

That Friday, after Rhonda unlocked and opened the door, I took a deep breath and stepped inside. Then, looking through the living room into the kitchen, I gasped and then fell sobbing to the floor.

Rhonda and I had met just moments before. I am certain she was stunned by my reaction, but she graciously said nothing and waited for me to compose myself.

When I could finally speak, I said through my sobs, "Please. Please sit down here. I have to tell you something."

She lowered herself to the floor looking at me with kind eyes. Finally, I whispered, "This is my house."

Through the doorway that separated the living room from the kitchen, I had seen the very *kitchen* that was on the greeting card I had bought as a 14-year-old girl. It had the same golden-maple cupboards and the same wide, double-hung windows above the sink.

I told Rhonda of the card, of the six children in it that I had dreamed of, but who had never come to me. But this house, *this* house was meant to be mine.

My husband arrived a few days later. When he saw the house, it immediately reminded him of his grandma's house. He loved it as much as I did. It took a couple of months, but we finally succeeded in making the purchase.

Our bed frame was buried in a storage unit. So, on our first night in the house, we placed a new mattress and box spring on the hardwood floor. We left the windows open to let the cool breeze in. As I slept, I dreamed.

My dreams were of this house in its early years – in the late 1950s. I dreamed of wearing a vintage apron tied around my waist and of teaching children to make newspaper hats.

That night, as the whistles of several trains passed by, I found myself between asleep and awake more than once. Each time, it felt as if there was some kind of magical time travel happening, like I was between back then and now.

Such magical moments have continued to happen over the years. While cleaning the garage, another message came in a remarkable way. That message confirmed anew that this house had been prepared for me many years earlier.

But that is another story I will tell you next time . . .

In the meantime, consider this question, and consider writing down the answer for your children and grandchildren: What brought *you* to Independence?

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About Voices of Independence

Voices of Independence is a monthly column by Cheri Battrick, sharing personal stories, reflections, and the deeper meaning of community in Independence.

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Cheri’s column is part of *The Independence Standard*—where local voices and in-depth reporting come together.

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Voices of Independence: How Do We Know We Are Meant to Be Here?

By Cheri Battrick | June 1, 2026



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I promised in my last column to tell you the story of how I knew absolutely that the house we bought in Independence had been prepared many years earlier for me. For this story to really make sense, I must introduce you to the Burkhardt family.

When David Burkhardt received a piece of land from his parents as a young man, he had big dreams. His father, Louis, had purchased several lots of land on the south side of 15th Street, a western extension of Walnut, just west of Forest. Louis intended to give the lots to his children for their future homes.

David and his young wife, Ida Mae Stewart, dreamed big. Their budget for building was small, and they certainly didn't want to go into debt. David had served in the military briefly

and his training in accounting had taught him the value of keeping financial accounts “in the black.”

The piece of land his father provided to them for a home sloped downhill toward the back of the property where a tree-lined creek flowed slowly west. The slope provided an ideal location for a multi-level home, and David knew it. But building one would take time and resources.

Starting small, he and Ida Mae conserved their resources. In 1957, they poured the basement and roofed it over. By that time, they had two little boys. A third would arrive shortly.

Their basement home was simple. The front door faced the backyard, and in front of it, David proudly installed a monogrammed, self-storing screen door. The aluminum screen guard had a large “B” for “Burkhardt” in the center of it. A simple kitchen and bath, two bedrooms, and a living room made up their living space. Fashionable brown and tan checkerboard tiles covered the cement floor except for the bathroom. It had black linoleum with flecks of color in it.

It took David about seven years to carefully work and save money for the upper floor. Then he began purchasing supplies for the main floor of the house above. By then the boys were nearing their teens and the family needed the extra room.

How they lived after the upper floor was completed is hinted at by the then-state-of-the-art intercom system that is still in the home. The master panel in the kitchen allowed for radio music to be piped throughout both floors—and to the outside. The Burkhardts could flip a switch on the intercom speaker in any of the rooms to talk to each other without having to yell.

David had wired the lighting throughout the house with a low-voltage system controlled by relays. The master control panel for the system was in the bedroom. It allowed David and Ida Mae to monitor which lights had been left on—or turned on by a boy sneaking around in the night—in any part of the house. The parents could then turn the lights off with the push of a button.

The intercom system as well as the whole-house fan that David had installed and the ingenious built-in dressers, bookcases, and desks in the boys’ rooms were definitely selling points for us when we were looking at the house. So was the monogrammed “B” on the aluminum screen door. It worked as well for our name as it had for the Burkhardts. But these were all bonus features. As I said before, it was the kitchen that initially told me this was my house.

David Burkhardt had no idea that one day another family would own and occupy this home that he so lovingly and carefully built. He died just two months before I began working in

Independence at my new job. By then, the children had moved Ida Mae, to a nearby rest home. Later they moved her to a much nicer residential care facility.

We didn't know any of this history when we signed the papers to close on the house. And it was only then that we learned the names of the Burkhardts. To our utter delight, it turned out that they were members of the same church we attended.

I was able to visit Ida Mae a few times before she passed in June of 2019. By that time, she was only able to carry on simple conversations with me. And it was through those conversations I learned what I have shared here.

The year after Ida Mae's passing, we all were homebound as the Covid pandemic raged. Two years after that I finally decided to clean and reorganize the garage. Up until then we had just stowed things in it, and it needed a good cleaning.

When I moved out a set of metal shelves by the front of the garage, I found it. There, etched into the concrete floor under years of dust and dirt and leaves, was the date the floor had been poured. It said, "May 1964."

As the bristles of my broom uncovered the words, the feeling that flowed through my body was a mixture of shock and reverence. I heard the words of a still small voice whisper, "Yes, this garage, this house, was built for you too." You see, May 1964 was the month and year I was born. I was indeed destined to live in Independence. In this very house.

From time to time since then, David Burkhardt has periodically checked in on the house "from the other side"—the realm of departed spirits. Usually, I sense him when I am in the garage. I can almost see his plaid flannel shirt out of the corner of my eye. And I can tell that he is wondering if I am planning to make major changes to the house.

Not long after we moved in, I decided that the paint colors would stay what they are. David and Ida Mae chose them with love, and they suit me as well as they did them. We have ventured to plant a garden out in the backyard, and some fruit trees, and I feel like David approves.

And I want him to. You see, I believe in life after death and the resurrection of us all. So, someday I will do a final cleaning. Not to get a deposit back, but rather in anticipation of turning the keys back to the man and woman who gave this house its life. After all, it is their inheritance. I'm just the caretaker.

I hope you will consider this question, and consider writing down the answer for your children and grandchildren: How did you know that your home was meant for you and that you were meant to be here?

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