



Ann DeFaria sits inside the home she has owned for 46 years

“Freedom Lost”

Tony DeFaria fought in World War II. He fought for his country. He fought for democracy. He fought for freedom.

That is what hurts his wife, Ann, the most. The 81-year-old Long Branch resident sees that freedom eroding away, one house at a time.

“My husband went to war for our freedom,” DeFaria says. “This is what upsets me most. I’m very patriotic. What they’re doing is scary. It’s unconstitutional, it’s unfair and it’s corrupt.”

“I could sit and cry all day,” says the mother of four, grandmother of seven and great-grandmother of six.

“Only by the grace of God do I get by.”

Known around the neighborhood as Miss Ann, DeFaria and her husband bought the small bungalow on Marine Terrace 46 years ago. Back then, they lived year-round in Newark, raising their four daughters, spending summers in Long Branch and making friends with their seaside neighbors, many of whom came from the same Newark neighborhood.

“The kids couldn’t wait to come down here,” she remembers.

Over the years, the DeFaria's made improvements to the tidy blue home, with its ocean views and small backyard. Eventually, they moved to the house full-time, building a modest addition and completely renovating the house.

"We figured we would stay here until the Big Guy called us home," says DeFaria, who lost her husband of 50 years in 1996, long before the neighborhood became embroiled in its eminent domain battle.

Now, the homes on either side of the DeFaria residence are boarded up. The same person owned both and sold out to the city. When she looks at those houses, she gets angry. To her, they are proof that the city is destroying her cherished neighborhood, little by little.

"I want to replace my fence, but I don't want to spend the money if I have to move," she explains. "Plus, they won't give us permits to do anything. They are making us blighted."

Like many of her neighbors, DeFaria got an inkling that something was amiss when the city refused to issue a permit for improvements to her home.

"I never remember opening a piece of mail and thinking, 'They're going to take my home,'" Ann says.

The former preschool teacher is hanging her hopes on the court case now before the Appellate Division.

"That's the only hope I have," she says. "We're going to win this case. God is on our side. He wants us to be happy in our last years. We worked hard for that."

And what happens if the residents lose?

With an income of \$1,100 a month, Ann DeFaria has few choices – and even less freedom.

"Where can I go and buy a home that's well insulated, has a new boiler, new heater, 1-1/2 baths, Anderson windows?" she wonders. "I have a nice little house. I have no mortgage. I have no idea where I would go."