

It's Been A Long, Long Time

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The door is shut, the key turned in the dead bolt lock. Mary Ruth and I step off the front porch for the last time, walk to our daughter's red Volvo SUV and get in. I take one last look at the house and then stare down at the floorboard as our daughter backs out of the drive way and accelerates down the street. She knows we want to get away as quickly as possible. We have left our home of over 45 years. It has been a long, long time, but it has come to an end, as all things must.



Fig. 1. The house the day we signed the papers buying it. Sod not yet placed on the lawn.

As we speed down the street, my mind drifts back in time to the spring of 1969 when I first saw the house. I had just accepted a position at the University of Illinois and we would soon be moving here from the University of Connecticut. We came in May to buy a house. This was the last of the 20 houses the Eisner's Real-Estate sales representative showed us. I did not want even to stop and look at the house. I thought it was too expensive for us and that too much of the price was tied up in a large, mainly decorative, front porch. But, Mary Ruth persisted, so we went

inside. I was still arguing with the real-estate agent about the front porch while Mary Ruth went on in and upstairs. When I saw Mary Ruth coming back down the stairs, one look at her face told me I had just bought a house. For the next 45 years our home was 2113 Lynwood Drive, Champaign. Mary Ruth was right. The house has been good for us.



Fig. 2. The house as we left it.

When we moved into the house in late July 1969, the house and the housing area were new. Our house was one of a very few on our street. There were only small, less than six feet tall, trees along-side the curb, planted there by the city, one in front of each lot. Our lot contained only the

house and a newly sodded lawn. No tree or shrub. When we arrived our oldest daughter, Colleen, was starting the 7th grade, our youngest, Allison, the 2nd grade. Our dog, Lady, was five years old. Mary Ruth and I had just celebrated our 16th wedding anniversary.

We immediately planted a small pin oak in the front yard and several trees in back. We planted hedges on the north (Spirea) and south (Forsythia) boundaries of the back yard. All grew rapidly. Several trees in back died; some were replaced, others not. Mary Ruth's brother-in-law, Norman, made a brick patio for us in back of the house. Much later we added a sunroom to back of the house and a small yard shed on the north side of the back yard.

The rest of our family lived less than 125 miles away so it was easy for them to visit us for family get-togethers. One of Mary Ruth's sisters had five children. Early on there were the cookouts on the patio. There were family Thanksgiving dinners in the dining room. There were touch football games in the front yard, the kids jumping over the small pin oak.



Fig. 3. Family party in the kitchen.



Fig. 4. Empty kitchen, as we left it.

Colleen and Allison had their own circles of friends who came to the house. Colleen's were sedate, simply visiting while listening to quiet music and having "fondue parties." Allison was the rowdy one, with wild pajama parties in the living room, directly under our bedroom, the stereo woofer vibrating the bedroom floor until early in the morning. There were departmental pot-lucks following seminars and position interviews, with the rooms filled with people. There were supper-club dinners with people eating in the family room and other rooms. There were birthday parties in the kitchen. And, there were the Christmas morning present openings in the living room.



Fig. 5. Christmas in the living room



Fig. 6. Empty living room, as we left it.



Fig. 7. Supper Club dinner in the family room.



Fig. 8. Empty family room, as we left it.



Fig. 9. Family dinner in the dining room. Niece making a face at the camera



Fig. 10. Empty dining room, as we left it.



Fig. 11. Mary Ruth's sister and husband eating on the patio.

The years passed quickly, all too quickly. The sister's kids became older and had their own friends closer by. Our girls finished high school and went east to Smith College (Colleen) and to the University of Michigan (Allison), returning home only now and then during the year and for Christmas. Lady died and was replaced by other dogs, that also died, to be replaced by still other dogs. The trees grew large, the ones in back shading the entire back yard. The city's maple and our pin oak grew to where they completely shaded the front yard.

Mary Ruth went back to school at the University of Illinois to complete the course work she needed to obtain her bachelor's degree. I had taken her off to the Army after her first two years at Blackburn College. She had completed almost two additional semesters at different Universities (Michigan, Connecticut and Wisconsin) as we moved through graduate school and my first position at the University of Connecticut.

After graduating, she began working on campus. My research career blossomed and I became department head, twice, for a total of 12 years. We both were so busy, it is hard to understand how fast the years flew by.

Before we knew it, we were able to retire. With relief from every day work, we were able to take a number of cruises to various parts of North America, Europe and the Middle East. I worked up and published my accumulated research data and did some historical research/writing. Mary Ruth was able to spend more time reading and playing the piano. We joined several ballroom dancing groups for which we had not had time while working. We were as busy as we had been when working, but no longer were on a fixed schedule and were much more relaxed. And so more years flew by.

Then, in early October 2010, our lives became much more complicated. Mary Ruth began showing the symptoms of frontotemporal dementia. Her short-term memory and comprehension rapidly left her. She was unable to continue many of the daily routines. I took over all household chores and spent considerable time making certain things remained calm. Mary Ruth acquired a new fascination with squirrels. In the past she had paid little attention to squirrels at the two feeders in back, on which I put two ears of corn each day. She had me put four more feeders on the trees and kept them almost continuously supplied with ears of corn. She sat in the sun-room much of the day, watching the squirrels in the back yard. We did make a few trips to visit old places in New England that had been so much a part of our lives while in the Army in Massachusetts and at the University of Connecticut. Before we realized it, we both were in our 80s.



Fig. 12. View of back yard from sunroom, when we left.

It was then that girls decided we should not continue to live alone. We could manage, but it became obvious that if something happened to me, Mary Ruth could not continue alone. They rightly insisted we move to retirement facility, Norwood Crossing in Chicago, Illinois, so as to be near Allison.

In order to ease leaving our home of 45 years and the transition to a small apartment, the girls have arranged for us to move to Norwood Crossing, leaving our home in Champaign intact, moving only the few pieces of furniture and personal belongings we need. This way, they hope we will not feel as if we have actually left our home. They say it is still here for us. But, we know differently. We cannot move back. It is too late. They will have to sell the house for us.

We have come full circle. We started out in a three-room apartment and 61 years later we are going back to a three-room assisted living apartment. Although it hurts to leave our home of so many years, we know this has to be. We have had good lives, sixty plus years together, while

living in five states. Mary Ruth was successful in her work, Departmental Secretary in Political Science at the University of Michigan when only 23 years old, a degree from the University of Illinois and 28 years working in Horticulture at Illinois. My research program was successful, generating a major tool for human behavioral research. I also researched and published several historical military accounts, one of which solved a long unanswered question from World War II. We have a well-financed retirement. We could not ask for more.

Allison's SUV turns off Lynwood onto Devonshire. Our house disappears behind us. We know deep in our hearts we will not see it again. There is nothing to be gained from visiting the house and once again going through the anguish of leaving.

As we turn north onto Prospect Avenue, for the last time, tears cloud our eyes. Even though we know it is now time to leave, we cannot help ourselves. It has been a long, long time.