

I lived at Hardin House from August 1, 1998 until January 21, 2000.

HARDIN HOUSE

The first time I saw the house at 538 N. Hardin Avenue, I was barely able to focus but saw that it was HUGE. Lottie had called her landlord to inquire whether he had any rental property available on short notice and he said, "Yes". The duplex unit had just been spiffed up because his mother-in-law was supposed to move in, but, instead, she entered a nursing home. Talk about God opening a door for me!!

I can still picture in my mind the three of us, Lottie, Jack Hammond, and me standing in the dining room that early Sunday morning in July 1998. A sense of healing calmness drifted over me as I stood in that house. Someone asked me a question and I told them to let me alone; I was arranging furniture. Lottie then assured Jack that I wanted the place. Oh, I had found a measure of peace in the midst of my personal storm.



Jack gave me a key and I could move anything I wanted into the house but could not sleep there until August first. That night Edna Meyer and I moved a few things in and met next-door neighbor Mary, who was concerned at first that somebody had broken in. The next morning Debb Elgin helped me hang the first pictures on the walls...my five kids' wedding pictures. All that following week more precious friends helped me begin the momentous task of packing up 37 years worth of my "treasures". (Sooz Bangasser had a snortin'-good time packing up my pantry.) That is Sooz below:



August First twenty five people helped me move from the farm. Such good friends and relatives! Larry brought a small U-Haul to move Mom's beautiful old china cabinet.



1.

Jeff Becker hauled all the rest with an 18-wheeler. As we took my possessions out of the house, we had a humongous bonfire going for things that just had no value. The kids (my college-age coworkers) had a great time tossing aerosol cans into the fire and watching them rocket into the adjoining cornfield.

Wonderful Bev Kruse was in charge of feeding this army and had baked many pecan rolls for the occasion.



Ellen (*pictured below*) had baked up a storm, too.



Many others brought goodies. They ate dozens of turkey sandwiches (Edna roasted a twenty-two pound turkey and prepared the whole bird into yummy sandwich filling), baked goods, and fifteen gallons of lemonade. We formed a convoy as everybody headed for my new pad in Freeport.

I noticed my new neighbors up and down the street peering out windows and standing on porches as my friends and family moved my treasures into Hardin House. (Later the neighbors told me they worried that a commune was taking over the neighborhood. Oh, Joy!) It had taken eight hours to load that 18-wheeler but only fifty-five minutes to unload everything -- then we ate more goodies with Bev still in charge. I can still visualize Ed Booth playing tag with Bev's grandkids on the front lawn.

In the following days my family and friends helped me set up the "nuts and bolts of living" in my new home. Because I did not own any living room furniture, one day Bev Kruse called to tell me that her neighbor had just placed a couch on the curb and did I want it. Oh, yes! A dog had chewed up some of the upholstery but a blanket would cover that problem. Bev also offered three recliners that they planned to ditch from their family room downstairs. Oh, yes! Because of back problems, I slept in a recliner and desperately needed one. Bud delivered them to my duplex.



He was always willing to come help me assemble a TV cabinet or stack a couple of dressers and bookshelves. Lori had flown in from Atlanta and she made sense of my kitchen. Cindy (*pictured below*) and Sandi arrived by the end of the next week and were invaluable help to me. Cindy and I were in Rockford when she spotted a microwave that was a good deal. "Time for plastic!" she shouted and we became the owners of a microwave.



Sandi (*Pictured below*) discovered an inexpensive way to make shelf units and sorted and organized all my Wilton cake pans.



Thru it all Larry and Ellen were my constant helpers many weekends and sometimes in between, installing shelves, air conditioners, a retractable clothesline, a wall mounted ironing board, telephone line extensions, assembling a computer desk, and also painting old furniture to spruce it up. Randy flew his plane from Seattle to Freeport and delivered

a computer which he had built for me.



A circle of friends and family wrapped me in a safety net of love.

Jack Hammond was my landlord but I knew his sons, Brian and Greg, better. They were always willing to help me out. (One night they even came, armed with tennis rackets, to help Mary and Jane chase down a bat in their side of the duplex.) My good friend, Edna Meyer, was kind enough to let me do my laundry at her house but I soon decided that I needed my own equipment. I mentioned to Jack that I needed a washer and dryer but didn't want to place it in the basement because of the terribly steep stairway. Jack told me that one of his other tenants had a stackable unit for sale. Merry Carpenter and I struck a deal, Brian and Greg brought it to Hardin, and installed it in my kitchen -- plus made an outside vent in the kitchen wall despite Jack's reticence about making a hole in the side of the house. They also put a new electrical outlet in the kitchen so I could place my freezer there. Hey, it was a LARGE kitchen! And they wired up a new outside electrical box so I could later string Christmas lights across the bushes in front of the house.

The upstairs had a large bathroom and three bedrooms; those bedrooms were packed with boxes. Downstairs was so pretty with high ceilings and wide doorways between the living room, dining room, and den. The house was filled with very tall windows and was awash with sunlight.

The front window faced east and the top part was leaded glass diamond-shaped sections so the early morning sun cast rainbows on the dining room walls, playing colors across the pictures of all my grandkids. One weekend morning daughter-in-law Ellen and I were in the living room reading and Emma (*pictured below*), a toddler, was playing on the floor.



Soon we noticed Emma puzzling over a rainbow shaft of light. It danced on her toys, but, when she picked up a toy to get a closer look, the rainbow jumped to the floor. She chased that light across her toys and hands. Ah, the beauty of an inquisitive child!

From the dining room windows I could look northward at the long, two-story, dark red brick parsonage across the street on Ringold Street. It had a white porch across the front with a family of bunnies beneath that porch. *Below is the house but the porch roof has been removed now:*



I spent hours watching those rascals play and harass the local squirrels. One morning I noticed a very agitated squirrel about half way up an electric pole. He was looking toward the ground and cussing in "Squirrelese". Sure enough, at the bottom of the pole were three rabbits. They had treed that squirrel. The rabbits ran like they were put together by a committee.

My friends at Micro/Honeywell usually collected any unused crackers and scraps from their suppers for "Linda's livestock". The next morning I spread the bounty on the front lawn and watched flocks of waiting birds (mostly crows) descend on the goodies. The sight of a very determined crow clearing the electric wires with a complete hamburger bun in tow is something to behold.

Most mornings during the school year I enjoyed my mug of steaming coffee on the front porch as the neighborhood kids boarded their buses at the corner in front of the house. It was a great way to get to know their parents too.

Mary and Jane lived in the other half of the duplex and they became my good friends.
(That's Mary and Jane with me below)



We spent some memorable days nosing around Northern Illinois -- even had a picnic in the gazebo at German Valley Park.

Along the east side of our duplex was an open porch that served both front doors. To keep the porch areas separate there was a railing between the two sections of the porch and steps. It was easier to scale the rail than go down the long flight of front steps and back up the other side when I wanted to visit them. Sandi suggested to the landlord's sons that maybe that rail should be taken down, but it never happened. Very often one or the other of us was baking goodies or cooking something special and phoned the other to "meet me at the rail" to share.

They kept a protective eye on me. One night I worked late (second shift at Micro Switch/Honeywell). Mary woke up and saw that my car was not parked out front. They called Micro to verify that I was there. It made me feel safe to have such caring neighbors -- and I made sure to tell them of any schedule changes after that.

In the dining room, about head high on the east wall, was a large square window. That

was the perfect spot for my treadmill and I could watch traffic on both Hardin and Ringold. There was a senior citizen high rise, the Mary Hosmer, (14 stories tall) apartment complex about a block east of my corner and I could enjoy the parade of people. At least once a week somebody there set off a fire alarm and the trucks came with sirens wailing and lights flashing. The first week I lived in Hardin House, I woke in the middle of the night to a room bathed in red flashing light -- scared the soup out of me till I realized what was happening. Was I jittery or what?!

One evening about dusk I heard an awful commotion. Imagine my surprise when I stepped out on the front porch and spotted a neighbor (from the next house south of mine) racing around his lawn in his underwear with a baseball bat. This could be serious! Brian had spotted a bat in his house and went a little ballistic, to say the least. The bat escaped but the whole neighborhood was on the street before things calmed down. A few months later somebody tried to break into that same house while Brian was watching TV. Once again the whole neighborhood, as well as a couple of squad cars, was out on the street. The culprit was caught but everybody made sure to lock their doors after that. That same neighbor had a beagle who did not appreciate sirens. As soon as an emergency vehicle was within earshot, that dog joined the chorus and howled long after the sound of the siren faded. This tended to spice up the normal neighborhood calm.

Attached to the parsonage across the street was the Holy Temple Church of God in Christ.



Carl Cole played the organ/keyboard and his teenage son made the drums come alive with music. You never had to wonder if there were services going on there. (Carl is pictured below :)



The pastor's daughter, Bobbi Collins (*pictured below*), became a friend and even helped load the Ryder when I moved to Virginia.



Halloween of 1998 was fun. Early that morning Deanlo Shird and a group of my coworkers descended on Hardin House to get Deanlo into holiday costume for his daytime job at an insurance company. (He worked second shift with us at Micro.) We laughed till the tears ran as we transformed Deanlo into a gorgeous woman, complete with makeup and heels. *That's Deanlo, in all his/her beauty, with Judy Toepfer below: By the way, I still have that wig.*



(He won first prize!)

That evening Tammie Lauff (*That's Sweet Tammie below.*) joined me for supper at Golden Corral, then we had a ball with the ghosts and goblins that rang my doorbell.



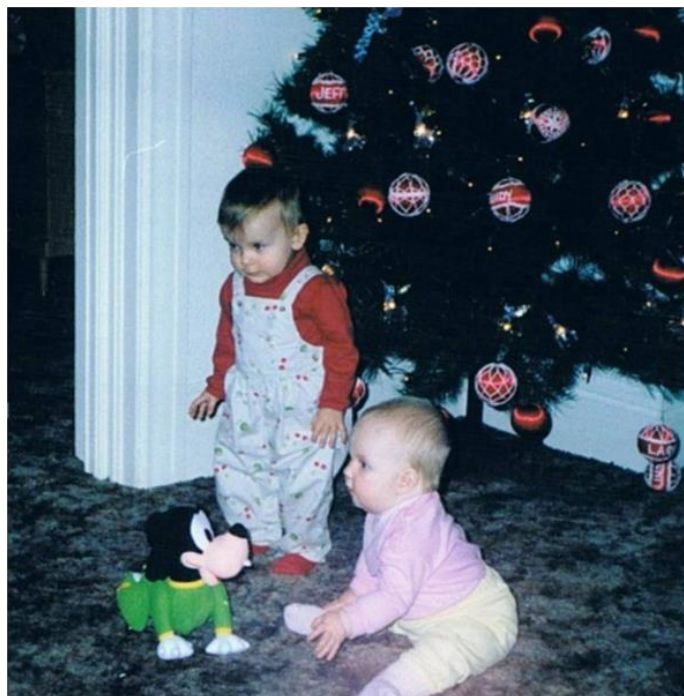
Each group had to sing a song or entertain us in some way before they got their treats. One little girl did a cheer for us. A little boy, dressed as a demon, sang "Jesus Loves Me". The group of teenagers sang "Gramma Got Run Over by a Reindeer". Many of my coworkers brought their children to my home too. The memories are so tender.

I spent two Christmases in Hardin House and loved the opportunity to wrap tiny white lights and pine garland around the banister of the beautiful open stairway in the living room.



That large east window was the perfect place for my tree. (That was the same tree that was brought home from the Chicago relatives so many years before. It did not make the trip to Virginia.) Mary and Jane and I decorated the front of the house with oodles of tiny blinking lights, thanks to that new electrical box that Jack's boys installed outside. I remember one year "The Gang", my friends from high school days, gathered one night just before Christmas for a pot luck supper around Mom's old cherry table, stretched as far as it would go (Randy now has that table in Janesville, Wisconsin. They had it refinished and it is gorgeous.). It was an evening of fun and peace.

Both Christmas Eves that I lived there Larry and Randy and their families joined me.
That's Emma and Amelia below:



One time we dined on Maria's Pizza -- MMMM! -- makes me hungry just thinking of that wonderful pizza. I've not found any in Virginia to match it.

During the spring of 1999 I mentioned to Todd Clancy that I was looking for several plastic five-gallon buckets to use as containers for tomato plants. When Todd was finished, I had four bright yellow matching pails with drain holes drilled in the bottoms. He is such a sweetheart! And the tomatoes were delicious. Todd is also the guy who hauled a huge discarded desktop from Micro in his van and delivered it to my home very late one night after work. That desktop made the trip to Virginia and covers a workbench in our basement.

The last summer in Freeport, Mother Nature had hot flashes and treated us to 100 degree temps for too many days. The air conditioner that Larry had installed in one of the dining room windows tried valiantly to keep up but cooling the large kitchen, dining room, den, and living room with an open stairway was more than it could chew. At Wal Mart I found an extendable spring loaded shower rod long enough to span the large doorway between the dining and living rooms. Two shorter rods for the dining/kitchen and the den/kitchen doorways and we were in business. Flannel-backed vinyl tablecloths (sewed together to make the appropriate size curtains) threaded over those rods and did a fine job of isolating the cool air in just the dining room and den, where I slept. And don't you just know, two days later the heat wave broke --maybe I should have patented the idea anyway.

The only thing constant in life is change and, after almost eighteen months, a change of address again loomed in my future. The decision was made to move to Virginia and there were some farewell parties.

Judy Toepfer treated Edna Meyer and me to lunch at her beautiful home. *Below with me are Edna and Judy's Zack.*



Neighbors Mary and Jane invited Lottie and me to a pizza party:



My Care Group from New Covenant Church blessed me at a dinner at Karen Peters' home.



Another day Edna, Judy, Tammie and I invaded Pizza Hut for one last lunch there:



Dear friends Keith and Villa Schultz took me to the restaurant at Asche Transfer for breakfast and I was able to say my good byes to a special person, Bob Ratmeyer.



My beloved family and friends came to help me.



Carol Midthun

and Elaine Hayunga



Debb Elgin,

and Vicky Olson,



Mary

and Michelle



Thoms,



neighbors Mary and Jane



Bev Kruse



and Tammie Lauff,



Lottie Lawrence,



and Edna Meyer

and my family swung into action to help pack and sort. See "Lottie's Love" story for more info on this special lady. Jo Jo Becker brought a carload of empty computer paper boxes for packing. *(That's Jo pictured below :)*



Moving Day, January 21, 2000, dawned bright and clear -- and nine below zero. Son Randy helped me pick up the Ryder and it was so cold that it made a major smoke storm most of the way across town. At the time I worried if that truck would make it to Indiana, much less Virginia.



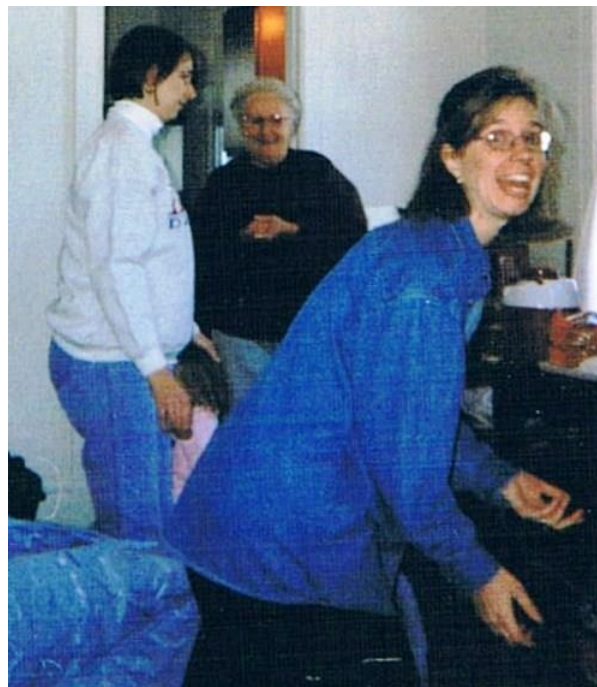
Son Larry was getting geared up for action below. But why in the world was the front door wide open in 9 below zero weather?



Twenty eight people arrived to help me load the rental truck. They formed a human chain to bring my many treasures down the big open staircase. *That's Jody Miller and her son on the stairs plus Cousin Harvey Suess below:*



Monica, Ellen and Edna (below) kept things organized:



Jody Miller and Bobbie Collins were such good haulers:



Daughter-in-law Monica was our official "Computer stand tearer-downer"



Roger Merrill and Jeff Becker were in charge of wedging everything into the Ryder. That is Audrey LaBorde with them below:





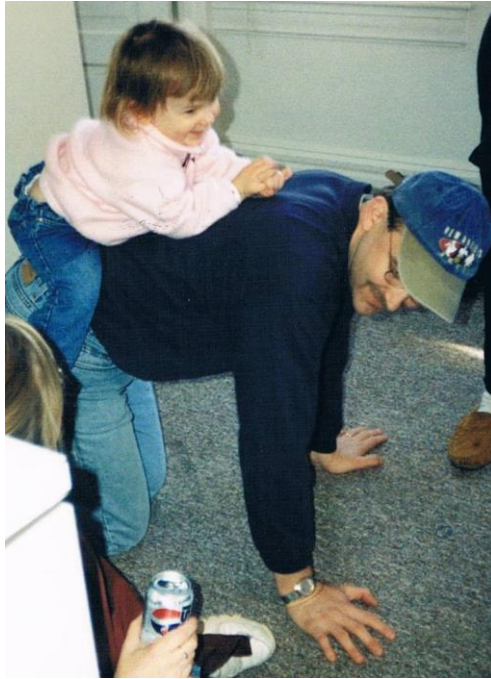
Bud made sure my suitcases were loaded below: With all that snow, nobody needed bug repellent that day.



Folks wondered if all the "stuff" would actually fit in that Ryder:



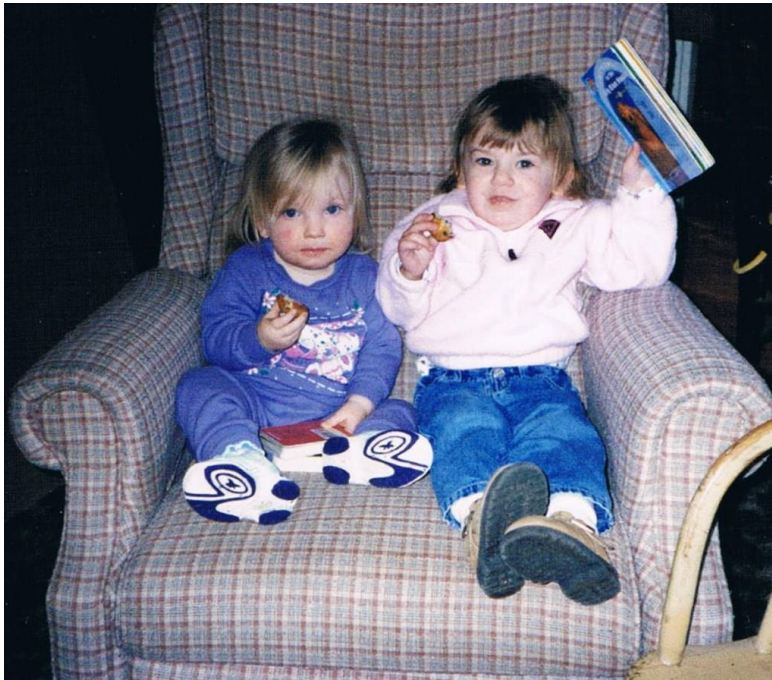
Sometimes a daddy (Larry) needs to take time out for the really important things with his little girl (Emma).



Sue C/J, Ellen and Monica found a spot among the chaos for some "girl talk".



See below: Amelia and Emma found a safe place, too.....and COOKIES!



Meanwhile, folks were still emptying that duplex. I wonder what had the attention of Audrey and Bud below. That's Bev in the background.



People were getting tired after hauling my treasures down all those steps. Good thing they were almost done. I think Harvey was supervising Bud and Roger.



Once again, precious Bev plus my pal, Edna May, manned the lunch preparations for my helpers. We were done loading by 2PM, then ate some good lunch.

Below are Jeff, Son Randy, George Suess and Roger:



Carol Midthun and Mary (below) were enjoying the chow:



Below, Audrey, Harvey and Bev were taking in nourishment:



Alas, it was time to say good byes to cousins George and Harvey. That's Jody Miller's kids and sweet Emma in the foreground:



Larry and Randy checked the Ryder and trailer one last time.

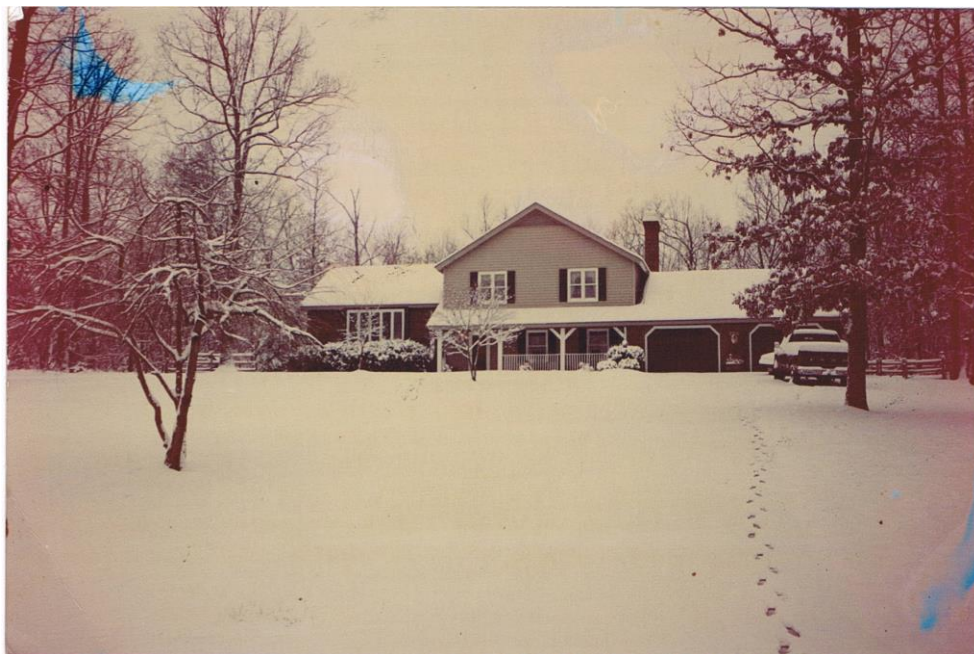


With all my worldly possessions packed in a 24 foot Ryder and my little red Cavalier following on a trailer, Larry and I left Freeport at 3PM, January 21, 2000 -- and I cried most of the way to Rockford, not because I did not want to move but because I couldn't take all my loved ones and beautiful Hardin House along.



Remember the couch that Bud and Bev rescued off the street in August 1998? There really wasn't room for it in the Ryder so, before we left, we placed it on the curb for someone else to own. By the next morning it was GONE! Hooray! By the second morning it was back on the curb in front of the duplex. It must not have looked so hot in daylight so the newest owner returned it. Jack's boys hauled it away.

Larry and I drove through snow and ice but arrived safely in Lynchburg, Virginia with no problems the next day.



Freddie, Joey and Larry emptied the Ryder into Freddie's side of the garage.



The Ryder was turned in and Larry flew back home to his family:



All my treasures stayed in the Watson garage for the next six months. Stay tuned for the story of my next moves.

As I write this in October 2004, the memories of Hardin House are still so sweet. It was a pretty house but the best part of it was the love brought into that house by all the great

people who came to visit. They were compassionate and caring and they put up with me. On a scale of one to ten, I'd give them a score of fifty.



TO GOD BE THE GLORY!!