

## WHERE DID WE LIVE?

When I first came to Urbana, Illinois, in September, 1942, I walked all around the town looking for an agreeable place in which to live. I had a vision of living finally in an attractive house or apartment after *nine* years of college accommodations. The prospects in Urbana were discouraging, the architecture in general was uninviting, and my salary—none received as yet, of course—was low. My hope did not match reality. In my wanderings, I did notice one house of Dutch cottage style that I thought to be pleasant in appearance, but the occupants did not have room for a boarder, nor were they interested in having one even if they would have had room, as they told this wanderer in no uncertain terms! The address was 606 West Indiana. When the house came on the market in 1953, we were able to purchase it. In 1942, however, I compromised my fantasy in favor of proximity to Noyes Chemical Laboratory and practicality of accommodation. I rented a room in the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Day at 1208 West California. It was only half a block from Noyes Lab. The Days ran a small campus cafe with hours of early opening and late closing that permitted me some flexibility of schedule. The room was a satisfactory, comfortable living space for a person who would spend most of his working hours in the laboratory. The Days and I became good friends, and I retained the room until early 1947 for Nell's possible use upon her arrival from the Netherlands.

In the meantime, that is, from the fall of 1946, I moved into a small, cozy house at 312 West Washington. I could ride my bicycle back and forth to the University. My hours at the lab were such that I did not notice very clearly the surroundings of the little house. I sent a description of the place to Nell at her request and included "grass and trees" around the house. When she arrived in February, 1947, she was surprised to find that there was very little grass and only one tree. So was I! I thought all houses must have grass and trees around them. My departures at dawn and returns after dark must have simply rendered them invisible! The sub-rental included a housekeeper who appeared once a week to do housecleaning and laundry. In those years, there was an excellent specialty food store only one block away, and the bank and shops of Urbana were close at

hand. Nell found the room at 1208 West California too hot and confining and accordingly accepted a mutually convenient invitation from my older colleague, Professor Harold R. Snyder and his wife, to be a guest in their large, attractive house one block further east on California Street. The Snyders had three children, for whom Nell served as a babysitter on occasion as part of the arrangement.

You will ask why we did not live together. Life was different in the 40s. According to immigration law, as a single unmarried male, I could not even sponsor her visitor's visa to the U.S. That was done by a married couple who were mutual friends. It was necessary for her to live at a different address from mine, which was also favorable for her local reputation in the gossipy university community. Finally, Nell had entered the country on a temporary visa, for which there was no long waiting period, with the idea that it would be her free choice as to whether to remain. She had many war and postwar experiences in Holland to set aside and many new experiences in America to assimilate. We spent much of our time together in the little house at 312 talking, listening to music, cooking U.S. style, and—talking. We had seven years apart to cover for a deeper mutual understanding. We replenished Nell's wardrobe, initiated her into shopping in Urbana-Champaign, and saw whatever sights there were to be seen on foot, by bicycle, and using public transportation. After we were married on May 10, 1947, the house at 312 became our honeymoon cottage.

We did not have much time there, however, because the owners reclaimed the house in June. We were able to find summer lodging at 711 West Washington in a house belonging to Ethel Scott. The paired Draper house was next door. The Scott house had the advantages, along with its smallness and convenience, of having a baby grand piano and a cool basement comprising study, bedroom, and bathroom. The intense heat of the summer of 1947 bent over the candles on the dining room table on the ground floor, as evidenced by some photos of that episode. Friends and university colleagues came to see us, and Nell's circle of acquaintances kept growing. My Oxford research director, Leslie Sutton, visited while on a lecture tour across the country, and we were able to write a paper together based upon my laboratory work of 1937-1939. My first version of the experimental results, sent by post during the war, had never made it to England. It must have ended up at the bottom of the Atlantic.

We heard from both Mrs. Scott and Mrs. Draper about the wonder of a place called Dunewood, north of Manistee, Michigan. As they described that summer community, a dreamy, faraway look appeared in their eyes. I had seen the same type of glow when LeRoy Hamp, my voice teacher at

the University of Illinois, was describing his summer vacations and time spent fishing in the streams north of Manistee. Nell and I kept the eye-glow in our memory, and we were able to sample Dunewood, Manistee, Michigan, first in 1949 and to adopt that magical place from then on for the rest of our lives. In August, 1947, we took a honeymoon trip, all by rail with connecting limousine or taxi, that included a cottage near New Buffalo, Indiana, on Lake Michigan; Boston and Cambridge, Mass.; Stowe, Vermont; ending at my parents' home in Mount Vernon, N.Y. We returned to Urbana in September, but we received notice from Ethel Scott, who stopped by occasionally to play her piano, that she would like to move back in by the end of the year. Housing was tight in Urbana. Rent control restrictions from the war years had not yet been removed. We searched unsuccessfully for some months until my Chemistry colleague, Dr. Therald Moeller, told me of his intended move and the apartment that would thereby become free. We leaped at the chance of renting the first floor of a two-family house at 805 West California. One of the deciding features was the height of the ceiling in the living room. It could accommodate the bookcase that Nell planned to have shipped from the Netherlands.

There were other attractive features of 805. Dee and Marie Hall occupied the apartment on the second floor. They were wonderful people who became lifelong friends and were especially fond of the children, serving as godparents (separately) for two of them. The apartment was convenient to Noyes Laboratory and to a food store, a drug store, and a small restaurant that were clustered only two blocks away. The house was poorly insulated and required regular stoking of the coal furnace, as well as clever banking of the furnace for the night. My first chore each morning was to start the furnace roaring and to light the gas hot water heater. There was only a bath, no shower. I improved the small kitchen seating area by constructing a counter that wrapped around the uneven north and east walls. Dining room, living room, two bedrooms, and a glassed-in/screened-in porch gave us plenty of space, especially since we had very little furniture to begin with. That situation was improved very slowly, following Nell's taste, and then rapidly upon the arrival of Nell's dowry from Holland. Yes, a real dowry! A dowry passed U.S. Customs free. It came in a large container, beautifully and safely packed, that was brought from the railroad station in Urbana (part of the Big Four system in those days) by a derrick tow truck, with police and newspaper escort, and was deposited in the walkway alongside the house. The apartment at 805 certainly looked better with the new additions: the sectional bookcase, made from old wood from a small church in Holland that had been destroyed (the bookcase was readily reassembled); an antique armoire that had been

made in England and had been part of the family's furnishings in Java, also readily reassembled; an antique bureau; draperies, paintings and a memorable portrait of Nell; several chairs, including a baby high chair (yes, we were expecting our firstborn); and numerous smaller articles. With the earlier wedding gifts of a dining room table and chairs and a record player, we now felt very comfortable and ready to invite guests. I had many hospitality debts to repay, and there were many friends for Nell to meet. As for the container for the dowry, I cut it in half, added a slanted, waterproof roof and a small ramp, and painted it to serve as a bicycle shed. It amused me to see that it remained standing for years after we left 805, although it did reach an advanced stage of dilapidation. We used it for bicycles, baby carriage, then tricycles, and garden tools. No one ever bothered the contents even though the front end was open.

In preparation for the first birth, I was assigned the construction of a wooden crib. The design was Nell's, as well as the concept that a husband should build a bed for the baby. I understood the romantic nature of the concept and also the limitations of the designated carpenter, especially when I contemplated the required design. I placed myself in the hands of a skilled, nearly blind carpenter in Champaign. Every other day, I stopped by his well-equipped shop at 5 p.m. to do 1-2 hours of sawing, planing, gluing, sanding, and painting until the masterpiece was done. He supervised, I built, and then Nell applied, free hand, suitable decorations. The crib stood on a moveable and removable base to which it could be hooked for stability. The crib portion had hand holes that made it easily transportable. By present standards it was rather clunky, but we were very proud of it. When Kenneth Jan Leonard arrived on April 15, 1948, we were prepared with portable baby bed, the decorated Friesian high chair, and a large English baby carriage, Rolls-Royce among such vehicles, that was also part of Nell's concept about proper baby surroundings and transportation. I planted a vegetable garden at 805 during the summer of 1948 in one of my sporadic forays into such enterprises. Our family mobility increased in the late fall of that year. It came about in this way. After a party for my research students at 805, Nell asked me whether I had observed how they had arrived at the house. I presumed they had used our form of transport, bicycles, but Nell informed me somewhat wistfully that some of them had arrived in cars. After some searching, we settled on a Mercury convertible. When the top was folded down, the baby crib could be lifted in and placed on the back seat, where it fit snugly. I imagine that very few people have bought a car on the basis of the proper fitting of a hand-made baby crib.

Nell's imported draperies were used to convert the front porch to a sleeping porch for us, which freed one of the bedrooms for visitors. With

the arrival of Marcia Louise Leonard on November 15, 1949, we introduced some flexibility into a bedroom/playroom arrangement, and Nelson did additional carpentry to add a play bench, many shelves, and a moveable box for playthings. Why all this detail? Simply to illustrate Nelson's occasional adventures in carpentry that otherwise might be lost to history. An outdoor sandbox completed his efforts. The arrival of James Nelson Leonard on August 15, 1952, posed a space problem. His crib—the decorative initials on the crib were changed each time—was placed in an alcove off the front room and partly under the stairway leading to the second floor. We were beginning to feel cramped. In the fall, one of my faculty colleagues, Carl Vestling, told me that his neighbor was preparing to sell his house at the start of 1953, was doing so privately, and would like to sign a contract of intent as soon as possible. The incentive for us was that he was the present owner of the house at 606 West Indiana to which I had been attracted when I first came to Urbana. Measurement of the height of the dining room ceiling indicated that the precious bookcase would fit. Everything else was satisfactory. We plunked down the necessary earnest money.

The total purchase price of \$22,000 for the house belonging to Ralph Grim was met by \$12,000 in cash that we had saved plus \$10,000 in a loan from Champaign Loan and Building Association, arranged by our friend, Wally Mulliken. We were able to move in after January 12, 1953, which did not leave much time for getting settled before we left for Holland at the beginning of February. However, we managed to put the house in order, but I must say that I was a complete innocent as to the requirements for furnishing a house and the cost thereof: shades, draperies, curtains, lamps, rugs, beds, chairs, kitchen furniture, etc., etc. What a blow! Just before we left the United States, we discovered an invasion of termites in the basement of 606, so the house had to be fumigated immediately after our departure. Among the simple joys of new ownership, I counted the ability to take a shower very high on the list. The two stories provided the first opportunity for adult and child privacy, with the additional calm that ensued.

When we returned from Europe in the spring, we began modifying the house and surroundings in earnest. New landscaping and planting had to be done. We converted the coal furnace to gas heat, tiled the basement floor in the process of converting the two large rooms to a play area for the children. We covered up the pipes, ducts, and beams with acoustical tile, and we introduced fluorescent lighting. The basement became a cool retreat in summer and a great place for activity, even roller skating, during the cold of winter. Construction projects from wooden blocks and toy

train bridges and trestles made it a fantasy land, especially toward Christmas each year. The screened-in porch was repainted in a bright color, and a Ping-Pong table attracted considerable attention. I remained an occasional contestant until I lost all interest when all the boys managed to beat me consistently.

By 1962, with the four children now aged 8 to 14, we needed more space, and major construction added a family room, doubling as the parents' bedroom, with bathroom and closet, and a new garage. The second floor was modified so that Marcia and the boys had separate half-bath and bath, respectively. There was even room for the Norwegian elkhound, Taina, that we had acquired in 1959. We had just completed repayment of the first ten-year mortgage when the new construction required us to borrow again, even though we received some timely financial assistance from Nell's mother and her Aunt Lien. Central air-conditioning and central humidification came later. Just for the record, the total cost of improvements during 1953-1987 was about \$23,000. After Nell died, I spent about \$4,000 preparing the house for sale—at a price of \$135,000. Although a large appreciation in value was realized during the 41 years of possession, all of the figures cited are remarkably modest when compared with prices on either coast and in most larger cities. The cost of housing in Urbana, Illinois, was not a major factor in our family budget, with the result that we could and did invest in vacation housing.