

Goodbye Gloucester Drive

I sit half way up the eight stairs looking down at the living room, remembering that these stairs have their own memories of the last thirteen years. The treading, trudging, climbing, crawling, clambering, jumping, leaping and walking up and down these eight steps to the three bedrooms and one bathroom of this treasured 1,080 square-foot split-level house memories.

I have trod these steps in happiness, in joy, in sorrow, in passion and in anger; all moods of a young mother creating a home for a growing family. I have carried laundry up these steps, sweet smelling baby clothes fresh from the outdoor clothesline, little boys underpants, socks and jeans, freshly ironed white button down shirts, pink, yellow and white frilly baby dresses, and sheets; adorable printed crib sheets, coloured bunk bed sheets and snowy white King sized sheets.

I have carried milky-sweet coffee back to the bedroom to sit quietly after the herd had left for school or office, to catch my breath before attacking the chores of the day. I have carried meals up to little ones with measles, chicken pox and flu. I have carried huge loads of laundry down to the machines in the basement. I lugged up parcels from shopping trips; first-day-of school clothes, going-on-holiday clothes, back-from-the-cleaner suits, towels and chenille bedspreads from sales of the downtown Eaton's and the Bay. I have carried up fabrics to sew on my Singer open arm, table model sewing machine. I have sewn the slip covers for the old chesterfield we bought for \$14 at the Salvation Army in Montreal before our wedding. I have sewn tea towels, curtains, maternity dresses, baby clothes and evening gowns.

I have tip-toed up the stairs to peek in a baby's room to see if he or she was stirring. I have stridden up the steps to discover what the children were doing when I heard a too-long silence. I have carried all my babies up these steps; new, pink, fat healthy babies, and laid them in the cradle from Kingscroft, the Nova Scotia ancestral home. The elegant mahogany cradle with hand turned spindles, forming a basket, suspended from two end posts, with its tiny new white cotton mattress and Granny-knitted wool blanket, white, with pink and blue diamond shaped sections bordered with a white three inch knitted border, smelling of that sweet soft baby smell.

I have padded down these stairs in bare feet, clean from a long bath, smelling of Shalimar, sheer white negligee flowing behind, to find my husband to seduce him from the television to come upstairs to our bed. I have watched from these same steps for the little Volkswagen to come merrily up the bend in the street after a long day alone with the babies, longing for her adult husband to talk with.

I have carried the eighteen month old down the stairs, almost unconscious from eating a whole bottle of baby aspirins. I have climbed the stairs without him that night, seeing his little room empty, his little bed vacant. I have brought him back tenderly days later, reassuring him he is home, safe in his own bed.

I have carried the little girl, weeping softly with a broken clavicle, down the stairs, cradled gently in my arms so as not to hurt her. I have angrily marched up for the tenth time to the little boy having a tantrum, screaming under the door, yelling that he didn't love me at all, wondering frantically what it was I had missed in Dr. Spock's baby book of how to raise a baby.

I have carried formula of soymilk, bottles and bottles and bottles of it to the colicky baby who screamed and shrieked with some kind of demonic pain, a pain for which I had no solution, no soothing, no answers, just the anguish of not being adequate. .

I have walked slowly up the stairs in sadness, newly from the hospital, having miscarried a pregnancy, a baby cheated of being born on February 19th of 1959. I have waited on the steps, late at night sometimes feeling lonely and trapped, distraught that my husband is out later than he said he would be, wondering why he hasn't phoned.

I have sat right here with neighbours watching our children playing in play pens, talking quietly about the business of mothering. I have coloured in colouring books, set up train tracks, stopping arguments and fights and taught about sharing.

I have carried pillows down these stairs to the living room to the round pregnant women who come for prenatal classes that I teach in my home. Finding a prenatal class taught by a physiotherapist who has had her own children is a bonus for these women. I wonder that I ever felt qualified to teach these same classes before I became a mother myself.

I have stepped elegantly down the stairs, in golden shoes with a long, elegant, formal gown, wearing Aunt Kit's pearls and Shalimar perfume, baby sitter waiting with Bill at the bottom, to go to a ball. I have walked down in cowboy boots, with all the kids in cowboy boots on the way to the Calgary Stampede. I have rushed down in low heeled grey hush puppies, to find some matching socks, to get the kettle on, to get the diapers off the line, to answer the phone, to get the mail, to make some warm milk in the night or to fly out the front door to meet a Bill's Dad or my mum come for a visit.

I have sat heavily on these steps in 1960, nine months pregnant with my second child when my husband came home to tell me that my dear father died that morning. I cried and cried, drowning in grief but then realized that new life went on. I had a child to care for. The child needed his lunch.

I have gone sadly down the stairs with my husband in our travelling clothes when his mother died in 1961, leaving the children with a baby sitter, to travel the long miles to Montreal.

I have loved this house, brand new when we moved in. I loved being the first owner. I decided that I wanted an old fashioned red and white kitchen, choosing the extra high, red counter tops, the red tiles for the floor, designing the little quarter round table in the corner and making the happy red and white curtains on the window that overlooked Currie Barracks until houses were put up on 37th Street behind us.

I loved designing the build-it cabinets in the dining room, with glass doors to show off the crystal we were given for wedding presents. I loved furnishing the house, designing a small table cum room divider that faced into the living room holding our record collection and creating a little separation between the front door and the living room.

I loved the fact that Bill could make a bathroom for the lower level, create another bedroom downstairs, make a rumpus room for the kids, block in the furnace room and make a rack for luggage and skis and toboggans and skates. I loved the fact that he could fence the miles of pie-shaped backyard and make it safe for me to put the children out to play. He dug a place for me to plant vegetables, made a sand box, put up a clothes drying rack and moved patio blocks so that we could have a place to sit. He made a drop leaf table on the divider he put in around the patio. It all suited us so perfectly.

I loved caring for the house, especially the rich, yellow hardwood floors. I have polished them, first on hands and knees with a new, sweet smelling can of paste wax and soft cloths made from old worn out diapers. I polished the steps by hand, with big round circles of my arms, watching the warm shine emerge so there is a reflection of the furniture in the floor. Then I used the electric polisher we were finally able to afford, lifting it carefully onto each step, snapping on the white lamb's wool buffers to make the shine gleam. More recently, we rugged the stairs with a soft, luxurious, pale, turquoise broadloom with underlay and a runner along the hall at the top. Now when I vacuum and dust the stairs, there are only the edges of the yellowed hardwood to rub with the paste, to dust and to polish. Lots of the noise of children's traffic has gone with the advent of the rug. It is a quieter house now, sound muffled with more furniture, richer curtains, paintings on the walls, more books and the paraphernalia for four children. We have packed their toys, wagons, jolly jumpers, rocking horses, school bags, records, music, outdoor jackets, tricycles, bikes, skis, shoes and boots.

I sit on the stairs remembering. The furniture is gone, the room below, empty. Goodbyes have been said to our trusted, treasured neighbours. Movers take the last load. I wait for my husband to come back with the new black Buick Wildcat full of gas, loaded with the children and their last minute treasures to take with us on our drive to Edmonton.

Excitement is high. There are new schools and new friends for the children, a new job for him and for me, new stairs in the new home in Glenora in Edmonton.



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