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English 306.01

McKinney

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The Ties that Plant Your Roots

The room is the same as it was seventeen years ago, at the beginning of its youth filled days. The beige carpet, once the pristine color of a floor showing square, now holds the memories of grubby children and pets. The terra rose of the kitchen wall has lightened to a dark cherry rose. Aged signs can be seen anywhere if one looks around. Rooms are in the same place and filled with the same youthful essence they once possessed but three now are a catacomb of the children that once slept there. The only changes that have occurred over the years has been the three times-removed couch and loveseat that now occupy the space its ancestors held before it and the new, 55-inch flat-screen television replaced the old 48-inch box that was held by the strength of the coffee table (which is now used for its original purpose). Of course there have been many changes that this house in the small, plain town of Goodland, Indiana, has subsisted through and will continue to in the future. It is home.

Moving Pains...

This home did not begin as the yellow, one-story house with a three level deck at the back of the house and a yard big enough for another house that rests upon the land today. At the time the current occupants, Randy and Belinda Hood, moved onto the property, the house was a two-story white house with a miniscule front porch that faced the highway which split the town like an open book. The family of seven—Randy, Belinda, their four sons, and their daughter—

moved from a rented country farmhouse in a cornfield to the house in Goodland in January of 1992, when their oldest son was in the sixth grade and their youngest, the only girl, was six months old. In an interview with the parents about why they moved, they had a difference of opinion.

Heather: “Why did you guys decide to move from the house in the country?”

Belinda: “Because [he] wanted to.”

Randy: “No, no, no...”

Belinda: “Oh whatever. That is too why we moved.” Her small smile radiated invisibly as Randy drove along US 52, never taking his eyes away from the road during the interview, towards West Lafayette, Indiana. We were all on our way to see their oldest grandchild in a school play (he played the role of “Tomato Juice” in America’s history).

Randy: “Nnnnoooo. We moved because the house [in the country] was not being rented out anymore. We had to find a new house to move into before we had no house to live in.”

Heather: “So why Goodland?”

Belinda: “Because his mom owned the house [we moved into].”

Heather: “Your mom owned the house?”

Randy: “Yeah. And it was the quickest place we could find that we could move into. The town [that owned the house in the country] planned to tear down the house as soon as possible.”

There has never been a straight answer—at least to Randy and Belinda—as to why the town tore down the house in the corn-fed country, a house that the Hoods’ lived in for a number

of years. Today one can drive along Highway 55 North and see a plot of land where a house used to occupy a two-story stack of wood and nails. There is the well maintained barn/garage that survived the destruction—it houses combines and other farming tools to use in the surrounding areas. The only other physical similarity that links the Hoods to the country house is the lone tree that sat near the front of the home where the young children used to play on.

Luckily Randy's mom owned a house in Goodland. They rented the house from Randy's mother until they could buy it from her—which was years later. Thus the married two planted their roots where they and their children could grow and prosper. And they did for another three years in that white house on the highway before the orange fiend of wood ate its full of the memories and left nothing but rotten ash in its path.

Ocean of Embers...

The house in Goodland caught fire as the heat of summer raged in 1995. The family was having a family-fun trip camping at McCormick's Creek in the town of Spencer in the southern region of Central Indiana.

Belinda: "It was late at night when we got the call; we were all sleeping in the tent when the police came and told us that there was a fire at home... We packed all [of the] kids and our stuff—which there was a lot of—into the car and got home as fast as we could. We got back about six in the morning and the house was gone."

The house burned at the center, spreading its inferno through the kitchen to the downstairs bathroom and the utility room, all of which were gone. The only sign that the kitchen

was indeed the kitchen was the bacon-crisp fridge sitting in its original place. Next to the kitchen, the stairs leading up to the second level, were ash and what was left of the level was unattainable—if there was anything left untouched up there is a mystery. The Hood family was left with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the clothes they had taken with them when they were camping. The family's pets, a Siamese cat named Sam and a Pomeranian named Max were both in the house at the time of the fire and were luckily rescued by firemen and both survived to live well into their old ages where sickness overruled their bodies before releasing them.

After the fire, family and neighbors lent their campers and aided the Hood family with anything they needed taken care of—food, laundry, showers, and clothes. The boys even had to play a baseball game in their stricken street close and helpful neighbors gave them mitts because their uniforms and mitts struck out and was left in the dust of the fire. They lived in campers for two weeks in their backyard, behind what was left of their home. They would have to wait another year to live in a new home that was rebuilt over the ghost-land of the burned house. Two weeks after the house fire, the parents and children were able to move into a massive white farmhouse on the outskirts of Goodland. This house is there today, but not in the best of shape. The house was a true farmhouse in the words. There was a massive front porch that wrapped as much of the home as it could before it couldn't anymore. The house squeezed all seven of the Hoods comfortably (and some never wanted to leave the house) and was surrounded by buildings for farm animals like goats and pigs.

Not another Renovation...

When the new house was being built to replace the burnt coal, Randy and Belinda were a part of all the planning. They had a say in how many stories they wanted in their house and the color of countertop (the original is still present in the house) and carpet. The pair pulled out a hammer and helped build the new house—a fact they were both proud of during the interview.

Heather: “Why did you guys go with a one-story house and not a two-story house like you had before the fire?”

Belinda: “[We were] thinking about being older and not having to walk up and down stairs. We didn’t want to have to worry about the second level being a mess if we couldn’t get up there.”

Randy: “...she was scared.”

The two were comfortable poking fun at one another as the interview was conducted. The ease of letting Belinda talk first was a second thought, but Randy would put his two cents in whenever he thought she was remembering incorrectly and it was he who remembered correctly. Both could agree upon why the house fire started in the first place. As it turns out the fire was declared as an electrical fire upon investigation and the family was lucky they were not inside at the time.

Shimmying into the Horizon

As the years have gone by, the house that was built in the ashes of the old has held strong, never catching fire for a repeat performance. Items have been added like a large multi-

leveled deck behind the house that protrudes from the house and that surrounds the pool creating a relaxing abode to be around in the summer. The decks were built by Randy—and in the summer of 2012 he added a roof to the half of the deck closes to the house—and Belinda plants flowers every spring. The air of the home radiates in comfort.

The two made a home for their children wherever they needed to. Their story may have taken them longer to reach a home that would last them until the end of their days, but the joy of living there with each other and their dogs and cat among other animals is evident when you walk into the back of the home on a Sunday afternoon and see Belinda lounging in the recliner and Randy right next to her on the couch, watching NASCAR. For me I never have to ask where they are because I know they are always in the comfort of home and safe in the only house that I remember growing up in. The small, one-story house on the highway in Goodland is always a place where the term ‘home’ will always be used.

Words-1,610

Writer's Commentary

In this piece I think I used narrative distance fairly well. I know during the reading of my peers essays and doing my revisions, I felt like maybe I was too distant in my piece, but I didn't want my presence to overrule anything in the piece so I tried to keep myself out of most of the writing or I grouped myself with my family. I mainly did this because then I personally could still connect with the piece—because I was writing about a personal subject—but I was still wasn't in my readers' minds when they read the essay. I think that's why being further away in my narrative distance (as I thought my essay was) was the way to go with this subject; so I could try to be more objective.

The format of the essay creates a chronological idea of what the homes my family has gone through before we settled into the house that we have been living in for almost eighteen years. I really like the headings I made to introduce each section, something I normally wouldn't have done. I'm not sure about the organization of the essay (I entertained the idea of moving the scene about the first towards the beginning of the essay but didn't) because I feel that it may seem a bit stiff, but I just couldn't find a way to loosen it (maybe in another revision when I have had time away from the essay).

I would say the passage I am most proud of is the one about the fire. I mainly focused on that during the interview with my parents, so I felt like that was the part where readers got the most out of me. As I kind of mentioned in my own thinking in the paragraph, I would definitely like to work on this more to put more description and detail into other parts besides the fire scene. That was one thing my group members said I should put more in. I tried with this revision, but I don't feel like I was up to my normal writing when it comes to description (that could just

be me), especially when it comes to the ending. When I was revising I know the ending needed to change, but I had writer's block or something (even after a night's sleep) and just couldn't see how I could do as what my peers suggested to me. So I still think this essay is in its shitty draft stage, but with more time it can become better.