

THINGS I REMEMBER ABOUT MY FREMONT HOUSE AND YARD AND FAMILY
BY Jean Exum Proctor

The "sun room" of our house, next to the kitchen, was the center of our family's activities. Mother kept books for Daddy's oil business in this room. She used a card table as a desk for her ledgers. Our only telephone was located on a telephone table in the southeast corner of the room. Our telephone number had ~~just~~ 4 digits, #2721. My sister, Anne, remembers that when she was growing up, the number had only 2 digits, #37, and at that time Fremont had a telephone operator to ring the number for you. (There was 11 years' difference in our ages.)

Daddy's desk, which I inherited, was also located in this room. He counted his money there, getting his deposit ready for the Bank of Fremont, where he was on the Board of Directors. The bank later became B B and T. The only time in my life I can remember my father's getting upset was if one of us interrupted him when he was counting money to make a deposit deadline.

In the "sun room" (today called a den or family room) we had a coal heater before we switched to oil. The stove pipe from the stove to the chimney was at least a yard's distance, which made a cozy place underneath for a nap in the winter. Daddy considered his sheepskin-lined jacket an absolute necessity in cold weather and it made a perfect pillow for his cat naps.

Mother very seldom took naps, for she was ten years younger than Daddy and seemed to have a boundless reservoir of energy -- always busy. Mother planned one meal at a time, and usually decided on her menu very close to eating time. After telephoning and having groceries delivered to our house by one of the local groceries, she quickly prepared our meals. She didn't like help with this, as we seemed to

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be more in the way than helpful. We never knew what time Daddy would come home to eat, for he might be working on someone's tobacco oil burners and get detained. Consequently, we never had a regular mealtime -- just when Daddy got home.

Homemade yeast rolls were a specialty of Mother's. It took hours for the finished product, which was worth it to all of us, remembering the delightful aroma and delicious taste. She often made these when one of the grandmothers was coming to eat with us. Her cherry pie, made from fresh cherries, brought forth a little song as she rolled the pastry for these delicacies -- "Can she bake a cherry pie, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?"

Our kitchen had a pantry in one corner, in which we kept everything! The 3 walls of shelves provided an ideal storage place for many things besides food. Daddy kept one of his favorite home remedies, a small bottle of turpentine, on one of the shelves. He prescribed it for the bumps, scrapes, ^{cuts} and bruises that the 4 children in the family often encountered. Kerosene, which Daddy sold, was also used as a topical medicine in our home and as a cleanser to clean the bathroom fixtures. After automatic washing machines became popular, the pantry is where ours was located.

Until the time of home washing machines, a black washwoman did our clothes. "Aunt Ida", we called her. This was a big help to Mother since there were 4 children in the family. When the nicely washed and ironed clothes were brought home, I would sort them in different piles on Mother and Daddy's bed. I can still recall the lye soap and wash pot smell in them.

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Mother and Daddy's bedroom adjoined the "sun room", as did the kitchen and pantry. The entire house was decorated by Mother's younger brother, William ("Bill") Rose and was one in which Mother took great pride. Prior to buying this house from Mary Barnes Edmundson and Willie Edmundson, my parents had lived a year, when they were first married, in an apartment in my Grandmother Exum's home and then rented 3 different houses in Fremont. Anne was born in my Grandmother Exum's house; Burt was born in a house on East Wayne St., now occupied by Mrs. Evelyn Pike. Charles and I were also born in the Wayne St. house, which our family rented.

The bathroom between Mother and Daddy's bedroom and the closest bedroom to theirs on the first floor (at different times my sister Anne's bedroom and then mine) could ~~could~~ be reached from a narrow hall leading from the "sun room". A full-length mirror was installed on the outside of the bathroom door. One day, "Mammy" (my Grandmother Exum) had started down the hall to the bathroom and was startled when she suddenly glimpsed her reflection in the mirror. She quickly said, "I didn't know there was anyone in the bathroom." We all got a good laugh from this at the time and every time we told the story afterwards. She didn't think it was very funny.

The house was not centrally-heated or air-conditioned. The upstairs bedrooms were too cold in winter and too hot in summer, but they were used, nevertheless, because there were 4 children who needed them. When the summer nights were extremely hot, Mother would set our old, noisy, black oscillating fan in my room and run it until I fell asleep. During the day we used thick paper fans with wooden handles also to stir the air.

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The heater in the "sun room" was our primary source of heat in cold weather. It supplied heat for that room, the kitchen, and Mother and Daddy's bedroom. A kerosene heater, and later a small electric one, furnished heat for the bathroom. The bedroom across from Mother and Daddy's bedroom had a small coal stove in it. We burned coal in grates in the living room and the dining room every Thanksgiving and Christmas. This was special! After my sister began dating Frank Hinnant, whom she later married, a fire in the living room was allowed to give them privacy.

Memories of my younger years are filled with thoughts of playing house and school, both indoors and outdoors. Mother liked for us to play outdoors if the weather was pretty because it made housekeeping easier; but on rainy days, it was a treat to play in the unfinished attic beyond the hall and two bedrooms upstairs.

My older childhood activities were not unusual. Bicycling and roller skating were two that I enjoyed. My first and only bicycle, when I was growing up, I got at a second-hand store in Goldsboro. We tied it on the back of the car for the drive back home. I looked out of the car window most of the 12-mile drive to be sure it hadn't fallen off. I had learned to ride on a small bicycle that belonged to Phyllis Campbell, a playmate whose grandmother's back yard provided a safe place to learn.

Roller skating was my favorite outdoor activity. I would skate after school around the flag pole and on the sidewalks of the nearby blocks. Sometimes I would stay out until almost dark. I have a scar on the side of my right knee as a result of a fall on an unlevel sidewalk.

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When I was older, I learned to drive Daddy's small oil delivery truck by watching him and pretending to drive when the truck was parked in the yard. One night, when I was 14 years old, Mother and Daddy had gone somewhere together (which was very seldom for they hardly ever left home at night), I told my brother Charles that I could drive. He said, "I don't believe you!" I then insisted he get in the truck with me and I'd show him I could. I drove around the block, changing gears as though I had been driving for years. After that, Mother let me drive on the back streets to take things to my Grandmother Rose ("Ma"), who lived on the other side of town at the end of Main Street. I could find more excuses than you ever heard of just to get to drive!

At this age, during the summer months, I painted oil drums for Daddy's fuel oil and kerosene customers. After the aluminum foundation coat, I would letter "THE PROPERTY OF J. B. EXUM" on the drums. I rode around town ^{on my bicycle} collecting from the customers. My payment was a penny for each dollar I collected. Saving my money, I finally accumulated enough for a War Bond. This was during the World War II period.

Daddy was almost always a cheerful and happy person, who seemed never to get in a hurry but to have time for everybody he met. He once told me, "You can learn something from everyone you meet, so take time to listen." His habitual whistle made you feel good and believe that life was beautiful. The little shoe-tapping shuffle he did accompanied by his singing "Happy Days Are Here Again", made you know the joy he felt inside. He expressed his love of music ^{also} by singing in the choir of the Fremont Methodist Church for many years. *Daddy insisted that all the children go to Sunday School and church, being a very loyal church member himself; Mother stayed at home to make everything run smoothly there and to enjoy the peace of a few hours alone. She joined the Methodist Church in her later years.*

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Mother's personality was of a more serious nature. She enjoyed work and usually stopped only long enough each afternoon to read one of the two daily papers, "The News and Observer" and "The Goldsboro News-Argus". Flowers were her hobby -- planting, weeding and watering them herself. Shopping in Goldsboro or Wilson provided time away from home for her. She would keep a list of things the family needed and take the trip two or three times a month. Daddy thought she went very often, teasing her by saying that every time she needed a spool of thread, she would travel to Goldsboro to get it.

Chinaberry trees, in which all of the children climbed and played, grew on the east and south sides of the house. Of course there were the usual childhood accidents from falls. A wild rose grew in one of the trees in the back yard, branches of which were used for many years to decorate for "Class Night" at Fremont High School before the high school became part of consolidated Charles B. Aycock High School. Parsley grew close to an outside faucet under the kitchen window. We always had some available to put on fish, which was included in our menu at least twice a week. Daddy had a reputation for being an excellent fisherman. He also hunted and was so successful at capturing his prey that we had meats not always served in other households--and not always relished by all the children in ours! There were turtles, frogs, rabbits, and squirrels. Burt and Charles, the boys in the family, grew up learning survival skills from our Daddy. Even we girls learned to love nature and the out-of-doors, all of us learning to swim before we left home. Mother often took us swimming at Grant

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Holland's Fishpond and Sasser's Millpond near Fremont and the Sand Pit near Stantonburg. She herself enjoyed the water. Anne remembers that once, when swimming at Sasser's Mill, she rescued a drowning child.

Daddy enjoyed plants in his later years. Rooting shrubs for friends was a favorite pastime. I can remember that one year he rooted several crape myrtles on the west side of the house next to the street. Rooting azaleas he also found easy and ^{he} loved to give away the new plants. He definitely seemed to have a "green thumb".

Very few things seemed to irritate Daddy, but the mocking bird that perched in the apple tree in the summer months so very early in the morning got his attention. An old barn in the back yard (later replaced by a garage) was where Daddy kept tools and corn for the ducks that he enjoyed raising in a fenced-in area in the yard that could be seen from the "sun room".

Daddy died in 1957 from a heart attack, but Mother continued to live in the house until her death from cancer in 1975. Following her death, the house was sold to Curtis Wayne Hooks, who in turn sold it to Patty and Michael Gabriel on September 29, 1989. The house and yard seem very much the same but are now providing different memories for more recent residents.