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To Grandmother's House We Go

John Moorman Shaver

It really wasn't over the river and through the woods, but it seemed so to a seven year old boy off with Mother and Charles and Susie to visit Grandmother's house. Leave Locust Street (not Avenue), up Adams Avenue (not Street), down Williams to Gallatin and across Big Spring (the river), past enemy territory (West Clinton School was the enemy to us from East Clinton School), and turn left on Holmes, canopied by a primeval forest of trees (the woods).

Grandmother would be waiting on the front porch, as always, to greet us. After hugs all around, Grandmother hugs being a more pleasant memory than Aunt hugs and cousin hugs, we three children would make a mad dash to the two majestic lions guarding the front porch entrance. All three naturally had to ride the same lion. And naturally the results were always the same ... big brother Charles up front, little sister Susie at the rear, and 'you know who' middle child sandwiched between.

After a stormy ride, Charles being the only one left astride, it was off to the front porch. Kathryn Tucker Windham knew what she was doing when she wrote Alabama: One Big Front Porch. The world made sense from Grandmother's front porch, even while peering through the ever-present Jackson vine. (Grandmother's Jackson vine, by the way, can be found all over the Twickenham District — a rather comforting thought). Adults' problems and childrens' questions could always be solved and answered while rocking on the front porch rocker or swinging on the side porch swing.

After Grandmother asked us children to spend the night, probably preplanned by Grandmother Susie and Mother Sarah, it was inside for the evening. The interior can be described in one word, BIG. Paul Bunyan could have



Grandmother's Jackson Vine. Photo was taken by a local nursery for advertising purposes.

stood ramrod straight in the parlor. The furniture was big, the portraits were big, the rugs were big. And the doors. The polished wooden doors were not only big, they even disappeared into the wall. I can't remember how many sets of doors did that, but it was wondrously magical to us.

Mother Sarah and
John Shaver in
Grandmother's parlor with
BIG furniture and
BIG portrait.
1944



The biggest of big, though, was the dining room table. King Saul could have comfortably dined there with his family. All of his family. We spent many an hour running around and around and around that table, almost fast enough to be melted into Little Black Sambo's butter.

Which brings us to the kitchen, and to Rose. The kitchen was Rose, and Rose was the kitchen. My mind's eye can't see her, but my mind's nose can certainly smell of Rose's meals, especially her rolls. Everyone knew of Rose's rolls.

After supper (not dinner) it was time for a lazy evening of Parchese and then off to bed. Up the long, steep staircase to more bigness. But before bed, we would always help Grandmother with some housework, dusting the banisters with death-defying slides, and waxing her wooden staircase with thump, thump, thumping joyrides to the first floor. Grandfather Doc may not have been a surgeon, but he did extract many a splinter from many a grandchild's impaled landing pad. Exhausted, we were tucked in bed by either Grandmother or St. Peter.

Morning would have brought more adventures, but it was time for the trip home. So there's no time to tell of the screened porch off the kitchen, of the never ending backyard, of the serpent-free Garden of Eden that was Grandfather Doc's vegetable garden and Rose's cornucopia, and of the unconquerable Fort Apache, cleverly disguised as the chicken house.

All of that is gone now. Street names are changed. Schools become parking lots. Primeval forests become forestless. The furniture (now antiques), the rugs, and the portraits have been distributed to children, grandchildren, and soon to great-grandchildren. And the ever-vigilant lions now stand guard at the home of Dr. Bob Moorman (he being the first grandchild and rightful heir). I, however, have the most priceless treasure, a cross-stitched gift to Grandmother from her friend Odell Whitten Smith, who spent her growing up years in the Spite House on Lincoln.

*AT THY HEARTHSTONE'S STEADY GLOW,
PRECIOUS MEMORIES EBB AND FLOW,
ALL THY DAYS THIS HOME HAS BLEST
THY BUSY LIFE WITH TENDERNESS*

This memory trip prompted me to take a ride around the West Holmes and West Clinton area. My forty-something mind became quite angry as I saw the dismantling of the Rogers home. But my seven year old eye saw something else, a noticeable sigh of relief from the old place, a relief from the fenced-in barrier to corporate expansion, to a fenceless new life on Gates, under the watchful eye and protective wing of Constitution Hall Village. And we can come and visit. Who knows. Maybe your grandmother will be there. I know mine will be. On the front porch. Possibly with a basket of hot rolls. And most assuredly with a Grandmother hug.



Miss Susie Dement (Moorman) and brother
William Dement and the lions. 1891



Big Brother Charles,
Little Sister Susie, and
John Shaver with one of
the lions. 1947

Dr. Bob (Bobby) Moorman
and one of the lions. 1936

Below:
John, 1991



