

Second St. Memories

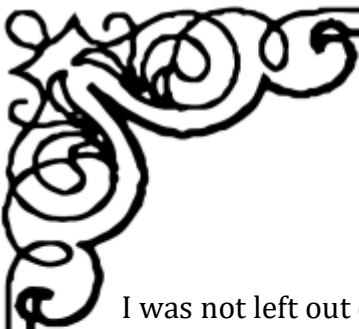
My parents, Bernard and Lucy Brennan, broke ground for the house at 307 South Second St. sometime in 1964. My mother and I had moved to Garrett in 1962, when I was in the third grade, and we rented a house at 804 E. Houston St. while my parents decided whether they would purchase a house in Garrett or whether they would have to build a new one. After two years of house hunting in both Garrett and Auburn they decided they would have to build. Dad purchased six acres of land from a neighbor and they hired an architect, Rick Shannon of Fort Wayne, to design the house.

Mom kept the furniture from our old house in Connecticut in storage for over four years during this process. I can recall many trips with her to the storage building downtown, where she would pull up the covers, look at all the furniture, and sigh. It was hard on her, living in the small, furnished house we were renting. She knew all along we would have to build.

Mom spent hours picking things out for the new house. I can remember trips to Fort Wayne to look at lighting fixtures, interior hardware, and all the other things that go into a new house. Mom and Dad acted as their own contractors because Dad wanted to use local businesses whenever possible. The main contractor was Mervyn Lengacher, a Mennonite contractor from somewhere nearby north near Grabill. Most of the carpenters who built the house were Amish and Mennonite. I found them fascinating. I had my favorites. There was one man named Dale who worked on the tile in the bathrooms. I would sit by him for hours, asking questions. He managed to get all the work done anyway!

Bud Saxer of Garrett did all the painting and staining. Mom and Dad had chosen wood paneling for the family room walls and I can remember lots of time spent matching stain for the trim to the exact shade of the wall. Another local businessman did all the plastering. Garrett businesses provided most of the plumbing and electrical work, I think, but we had to use a cabinetmaker in Auburn for the kitchen cabinets. He drove Mom crazy because he missed every deadline. Many times work was held up while we waited for cabinets to be installed. But when they were finished they looked beautiful.

Mom was ahead of her time with the floor plan. It's almost standard today to build big, open kitchens with a family room but it wasn't very common in the 60's. I personally think she was ahead of her time with the bathroom planning too. The master bedroom had two adjacent baths. Mom said it was because Dad wanted a shower and she wanted a tub. I think she just wanted her own bathroom, a sentiment that most women would agree with today!




I was not left out of all this planning. I had a large bedroom on the second floor, with my own bath and a small adjacent room at the top of the stairs, which we used for guests. The showerhead in the bathroom was installed at a 12-year-old girl level, which drove my tall husband crazy when we used it in later years during visits to my parents. I was in a pink phase when we planned the house, and my bedroom was pink, with a pink rug, pink and white wallpaper in the bathroom, and pink and yellow flowered wallpaper accents in the bedroom. Mom used a decorator from Fort Wayne but I got to pick everything out. My pink period was long past by the time I was in my teens but I was stuck. Mom said a firm “No” when I begged to redecorate.

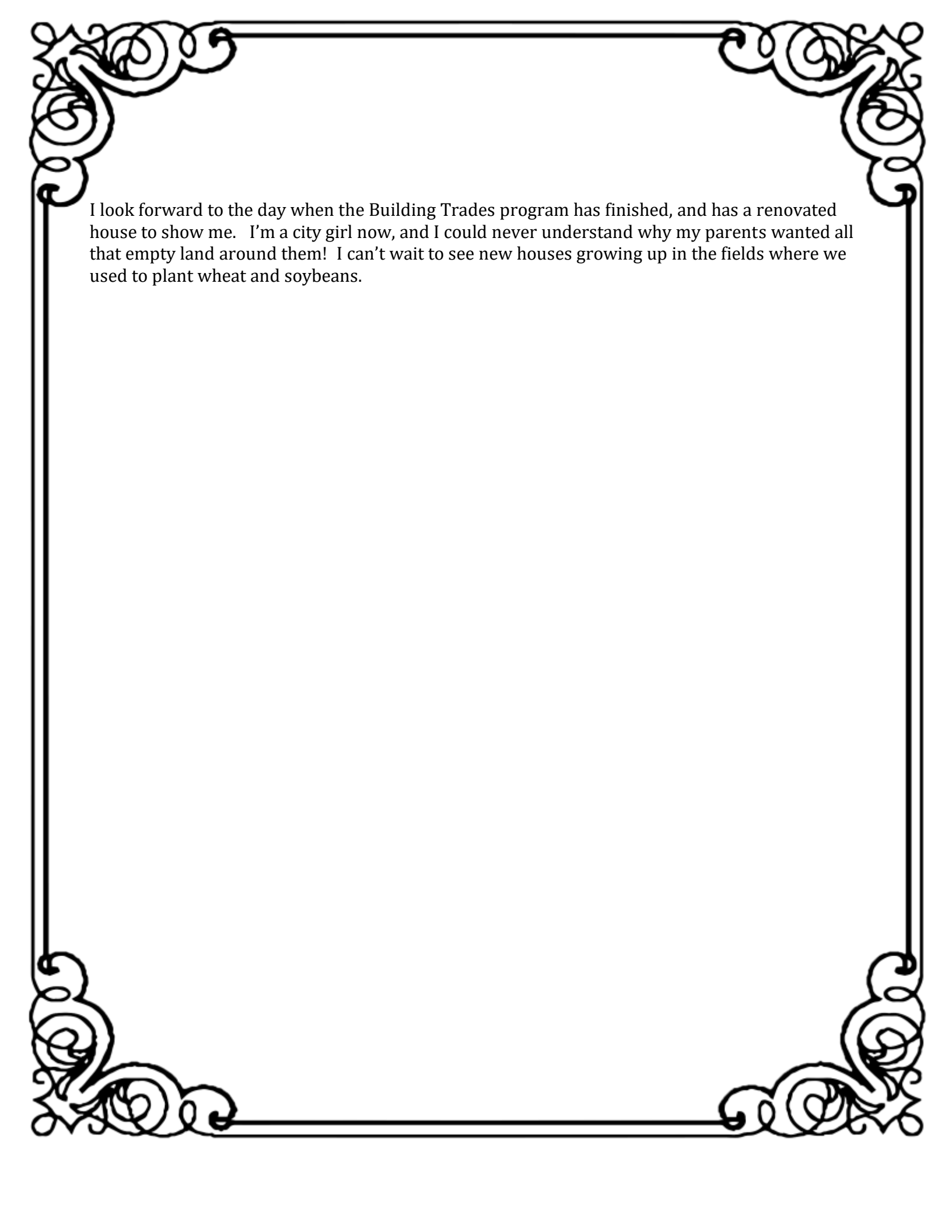
Mom and Dad loved landscaping. They had many large trees transplanted to the front and back yards. It was amazing watching the rig arrive carrying a new tree with a big ball of earth around it. It would scoop out a huge ball of dirt in the yard and pop the tree right in. Mom and Dad also had an irrigation system installed to keep the acre of lawn in front of the house looking green and beautiful. Dad loved to put all his nephews to work hauling stones out of the yard. I was a girl and escaped that job.

Several things did not work out as planned. Someone talked Mom and Dad into installing an intercom system in the house. We never used it. Also, there were plans to finish off the basement so I would have space for my friends when I was older. That never happened but my friends and I spent many hours in the basement anyway, playing pool and ping-pong, and chasing the little frogs that came up through the drains. We used to try and bounce ping-pong balls off their heads.

My large bedroom came in very handy for slumber parties. My three best friends and I always managed to figure out a way to sleep in the bedroom. Sometimes all four of us crammed into the double bed (one person lay across the bottom). And on one famous occasion I sneaked twelve to fifteen girls in my room when a party we were attending prompted neighbors to call the police. I told them all to be quiet or my Dad would kill them. I sneaked them out again the next morning, and told my parents all about it at breakfast.

It was great living so close to the school. At first I crossed Second St. and climbed the fence to avoid going all the way around to Houston St. That stopped when someone told my parents what it looked like when I climbed the fence in the short skirts I wore. But it was fun while it lasted.





I look forward to the day when the Building Trades program has finished, and has a renovated house to show me. I'm a city girl now, and I could never understand why my parents wanted all that empty land around them! I can't wait to see new houses growing up in the fields where we used to plant wheat and soybeans.