

# Porch Was An Anchor

In a small town, this screened oasis harbored love, friendship and stability over the years.

By Margo Warmack, Plano, Texas

THE SMALL, pristine white house had a screened-in front porch that was nearly the width of the house. And of all the places in the world I could be, I would choose Muriel's porch.

The loving home of my grandparents Tom and Muriel Jenkins was a block from the Ohio River in the small southern Illinois town of Rosiclare.

My family moved there in 1952, when I was 8, but it has always been home to me. My father's job took us many places as I was growing up, but never have I felt at home except for Rosiclare.

We visited at least every summer and many holidays, if we could. The joy of my youth was those summers with Gram and Gramp as feelings of love, comfort, acceptance and joy filled me.

As you approached the house on the flagstone walk, a border of ageratum, small low-growing plants with fuzzy purple flowers, flanked you. A white-painted concrete pot with pink petunias overflowed near the walk like a waterfall.

On the steps leading to the porch were specimens of fluorspar, a mineral found in the mines of Rosiclare. The purple, yellow and pink rocks sparkled in the sunlight

As I stepped onto the porch, I'd feel myself relax at the sight of the large, comfortable wicker porch swing. It was padded with a green-and-white-striped cushion that invited you to curl up to read or nap.

There also was a green rocking chair and a large glider so there was room for all of us to gather and enjoy the cool evenings.

I can just see Gram in the rocker, after washing the evening dishes. She would be in her housedress with an apron, and her stockings were rolled down around her ankles.

Muriel Jenkins was quite a woman. When she was 3, her mother died. Her dad, William Madden Wood, bought this house when she was 16, and she took care of him until she married my grandfather Thomas Jefferson Jenkins. Gram and Gramp remained in the house until they died, having been married for 67 years.

The screened-in porch was added later. Every Christmas, Gram made her own decorations for the porch, and they were always beautiful.

In the evenings, after dinner, I'd sit with Gramp on the swing. There was a string attached to the wall, and he would pull us back and forth. We'd watch folks walk by on their way to the Capitol Theatre for a movie or to Tiny's restaurant for a hamburger.

That was almost all there was to see, because the levee was across the street and the park and Ohio River were on the other side of that. If it was quiet, sometimes you could hear a barge passing by. If there was a breeze, you could hear the rustle of the massive cottonwood trees in the park.

The porch was a gathering place where laughter and love could always be found. When our entire family was there, the laughter was contagious. When my mother, Geraldine, and her two sisters, Rose and Emmy, joined us, giggling abounded.

And since the three sisters had grown up in that house, when they were in town, their friends would stop by to visit.

Back in the late 1940s through the '60s, our lives were easier and people seemed more interested in each other. They took time to visit and to care.

Our homes don't have porches anymore; we pull our cars into the garage at the back of the house and don't even see our neighbors, much less visit.

I long for those days of peace and feeling like I belonged. And if I could make a living there today, I'd be back quicker than you could even say "Muriel's porch."