

OF LOSS AND DISCOVERY

Early in my career, I'd sometimes have to travel. And when Mary packed my suitcase she'd always hide little notes for my discovery. One, a long-lost, hand-sketched rendition of the cozy den in our tiny house in Sherwood, reminded me that "home is waiting for you."

As part of the painful post-death process of deciding what should stay and what should go, I determined to dispose of an old bench Mary had loved. But just this week I rediscovered this sketch and a lengthy description Mary wrote about it in 2002.

Here's how she put it:

"The framed 'With Joy We Greet You' over the bench was sewn by me. The doll on the shelf is 108 years old and a family heirloom. The little car on the shelf is James' toy jalopy from 50-plus years ago. The rooster is composed of various kinds of beans and was made by me.

"Amos is chasing the original Puddy Tat... but only because she was already running away. She was definitely 'the boss.' Jenny is lying on her little pallet listening to a tape recording of her daddy playing his harmonica--and awaiting his return home.

"I have now had the bench for 30 years. It came from a huge house that was razed in order to build the Wilbur Mills freeway in Little Rock. The bench was old then. What was interesting to me was that when I went to look at the bench I recognized the old house!

"The house was one that had been divided into many small apartments when I was a little girl. I had visited with Mother's friend there many, many times as a child. The bathroom was down the hall, and I am still reminded of it by soaps with an old-fashioned smell.

"I had never thought about where that house might be, had never even thought about it since childhood. So imagine my surprise when I started up those long steps at the back of the house to see the furniture!

"I remember going there when I was four or five. We lived in Crossett then, and I was so homesick as I went up those steps that I was nearly ill. Grief stricken as if a death had occurred. How can a child explain these things? Of course, I never told anyone how I felt.

"Martha Rogers' son worked for the owners, and he is the one that took me to see the furniture just before the house was torn down. Remember, we played Forty-Two with the Rogers. Oh, those precious times. Why do we not recognize them? Let us recognize today for what it is: precious, no matter what happens."

And much has happened since we moved from the little house in Sherwood in 1980. Now gone are the cozy den, the rooster, Amos, Puddy Tat... even Jenny and Mary. But the bench endures. And through this unusual epiphany of loss and discovery, the bench will stay, perhaps creating a meaningful link to a pleasant past for someone in a future generation.

Though time invariably tears apart the picture of life as we once knew it, memory is the glue that puts the pieces back together.

The sketch mentioned here can be viewed at www.james-mc.com.