

REDECORATED HOUSE DOESN'T FEEL LIKE HOME

Originally published in *The Blade* on Thursday, December 31, 1998

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Home for the holidays? Hardly.

After working a double shift and making the nearly three-hour drive to Canton so that I could spend the holidays with my family, I pulled my beat-up car into the driveway of my ancestral home.

Tired but content, I slammed the car door shut, and my house echoed a welcome back. Or maybe it was a warning.

I haven't lived at home since the summer, and I was pleased to note, as I turned the key to the front door, that my parents hadn't changed the locks during my absence.

That's when I noticed something was different. The front door, which used to be white, was now a glossy black. My parents had repainted it without warning me. No big deal, I shrugged.

I opened the door and was punched in the face. Uppercut, uppercut, body blow. My parents were beating me up. Figuratively, anyway.

From the landing of my split-level home, I was witness to an array of atrocities. The dynamic orange carpet that I used to crawl on as a child had been replaced by a conventional gray. The yellow wallpaper over which I used to run my dirty hands had been ripped down and the walls had been painted a common white.

Everything in the house associated with my childhood was being systematically eradicated. I was stunned. I raced up the stairs and poured a drink to steady myself.

Then ... body blow, body blow, knockout.

The hallway to my bedroom used to be peppered with pictures produced by the loving hands of my brothers and me. The awards we were lucky enough to win announced to visitors the glory we brought to the family name. And in the family room our angelic likenesses graced the top of the piano.

All were gone now. All except the angelic likenesses - those were relegated to the top of a tall cabinet and replaced by a photo of my father sporting a devilish grin.

My parents didn't understand my anger. The orange carpet, they said when I confronted them, had to go. Very passe. And the walls, that was kind of fun. They've had plenty of time on their hands since I left the nest to take a job in Toledo and my brothers entered college.

But the photos? They dodged that one altogether.

So there I was, surrounded by family but feeling alone. It was worse than the time during my freshman year at college when I discovered that my parents had turned my bedroom into the guest room and permitted my younger brothers to sell various items of my furniture. I still could come home, but I might have to sleep on the couch.

I felt rejected by my own parents, my own home. I knew that some things would change when my parents were left home alone. I knew they would be bored without the kids. I knew that might mean some home improvements. But I never guessed that they would turn on us so, doing everything but hanging up a sign saying this is their home now and not ours.

What did I have to be thankful for? Toulouse-Lautrec? While Webster's insists there is a 'me' in 'home,' I was becoming more and more doubtful.

Fortunately, the holiday was a day of healing. Everything about the family that I love was there - Grandma's

mashed potatoes, Dad's ferocious football howl, Mom's tender hug. Even without the carpet and even without the pictures, I was unmistakably home.

While I was deeply traumatized by the experience, I decided that I can accept change even if I don't like it. I do not like, nor do I advocate, change, but I believe I can deal with it.

I acted on this decision the following day by taking part in the family portrait my mother scheduled. Still a little upset, I made peace. Together as a family, we walked across the gray carpet and gathered before the white walls. Breaking from the past, we posed for a picture for the future.

My only question was - Where will it go? In the cupboard?

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