

Now we cater to our Corgi puppy, Gwendolyn Clover.

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“Home Repairs”

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Leash in hand, I stand and look back at our house. How many times did I paint the outside of our house? Three times since 1989, once perched on a ladder listening to the radio when Penn State became football champions. Years later came that hail storm and us conceding to vinyl siding, new windows, and metal roof. I'll probably repaint and wallpaper our family room again, which sent me recalling the repairs and changes we've made to our house, walls repainted, wallpapered, furniture moved around, new furniture added, piles of stuff dumped. Ceiling fan installed. Central air installed, thank goodness. Plank flooring in the den and family room. Twice, new rugs upstairs. New paintings, new curtains. Our son's bedroom turned into the Tuscan guest room. Our girls' bedroom fitted into my library. Bathroom remodeled.

All stored items – kids' school papers, trophies, dinosaurs, blue ribbons, Christmas decorations – were removed from closets, utility room, and attic, and packed away in a tidied garage. The joy and relief of subtraction. The cinder block basement was transformed into a Moulin Rouge pool hall. We replaced our deck with pebbles, lined with rocks and daylilies borrowed from a nearby creek, because our dog ate our deck. The backyard was fenced to keep dog and kids contained, fence removed years later. Yews were replaced with English roses, lavender, and a Rose of Sharon. Trees had to be trimmed. One of our better changes? Automatic garage doors.

Then again we remember all our varied home dwellers, including my mother-in-law who lived in our dining room before nursing home. Shall we mention our felines? Mrs. Miniver, cat matron. Bosco. Oliver. Owen. Jeremy. Pseudolus, our wicked Siamese. Hughey. Adric and sister, Nyssa. Plus our Labrador, Zoe, and bouncy Irish Jack Russell, Bailey. Now we cater to our Corgi puppy, Gwendolyn Clover.

Do you have a favorite part of your house? The part that makes a house a home? This may sound silly, but I love my stairway newels. I had to look up what they are called. They are the posts supporting the stairway railings. The newels, these posts, are flat topped. I love them. I put books on them to take upstairs or downstairs. I place my coffee mug on them. They tell me this is my friendly home.

It's been a good house, howsoever we've remodeled it over the years, appreciating the comfort of familiar leaky faucets, lichen growing on my contented heart. It's the way you feel after a long trip, living out of your suitcase. I guess a house, and all things, must change, adapt, evolve, as our needs and wants change, as we keep trying for something better. Here we've experienced decades of goodbyes and hellos, years of letting go. I guess nothing stands still until we're dead.

A pastor friend who also was a psychologist led a Bible study where he criticized 'more' as a key source for human unhappiness. He was right, of course. But the problem isn't just the 'more' – the problem is wanting more of the things that cannot satisfy. Where would we be without those who heeded their instinct for more, more than what is known, safe, familiar?

It's why all three of our kids live over 2,000 miles away in their own homes. We have only ourselves to blame. We resolved from the beginning we wanted our kids to be raised surrounded by great art, great music, great literature, great religion, and the gift of travel. We wanted them hungry. We wanted them to walk toward horizons worthwhile, walking forward to discover what they would discover. Society places great stock in where we stand on positions, issues. Standing is okay, unless where you take your stand is for something wrong, something false, something unkind, something selfish. Better than taking a stand is walking toward something better, something satisfying, something right. We ache because we, alone among God's creatures, realize what we don't know.

Fun summer reading includes "The Wind in the Willows," by Kenneth Grahame -- great writing commercialized by Disney. Mr. Toad's wild ride. Badger. Otter. Mole. There's a haunting passage when Ratty, comfortable and settled in his cherished River Bank Home, senses a yearning for something new after a conversation with migrating swallows. Something awful and beautiful awakened in him. In Ratty's case, he answered this call not with relocation but with a walk in his imagination. He resumed writing poetry.

As my migratory daughter chirped years ago: "Dad, you never land till you jump."