

A Seeker's Journal

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A HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

OLD HOUSES have always fascinated me. They are reluctant to give up the secrets that lie imbedded within their walls, and yet a whisper of the past is always present and can be discerned by the visitor who listens. Such is the small house that my parents treasured during their last years. Almost fifty years ago, my two siblings and I pooled resources that enabled my parents to have their own home; something not possible for them during their working years. It gave them a priceless permanency, and for the years of their occupancy, a base of family roots enjoyed by everyone who visited there.

With the passing of my parents and siblings the old house became mine. I used vacations in the spring and fall to manicure the grounds and keep the house in good condition. It seemed to welcome me each time I went there and it was sad to see me leave. My wife and I planned our retirement there, spending hours in dreaming of the perfect retreat that we would make together.

As retirement age approached, unplanned events occurred for both of us, and resulted in a changed evaluation of that house as our home in future years. Given our need to be near an advanced medical facility, we reluctantly gave up our dream of retiring to the country and let our plans for the old house wither and die.

In a move designed to keep it in the family, I sold the place to my daughter and her husband who is a competent carpenter among other things, and capable of maintaining the house as I had done. He replaced the roof and is going to install new windows and add two rooms to the existing structure. The old house seemed to be happy about all the enhancements; I could feel it in every room. Then word came from the friend who looks after the place for us; *two survey stakes had appeared near the back door.*

James, my son-in-law and I knew that work was being done on the highway far to the south; we did not know of plans for our area. The discovery of survey stakes on our property was a shock that sent both of us to our telephones in a search for information. A cousin living less than half a mile from the property seemed to be unaware of any pending action by the highway department. James was advised by the game warden there that we were likely to lose several pecan trees and a storage barn, but had no other information. A few days later, we received our official notices of a meeting to be held in conjunction with proposed rights-of-way along the highway in front of our property.

We arrived at the house to find several of the flagged stakes in our yard and at various spots across the two acres that bordered the highway. What chilled us both was the stake just inches from one side of the house.

We signed in at the designated meeting place, subdued and resigned to hear bad news. A personable young man with diagrams and maps spread out before him on the table introduced himself and we settled in as he found the page where our property was illustrated. He explained how the highway would be reworked to include wide inclined embankments on each side. It was the west embankment that would require some 35 feet off the front of our land. In all, we would lose about half an acre, which would include five pecan trees and a storage barn. The fact was that the actual roadway would be farther from our house than it was now. We could live with that, but what about the stake at the side of the house? That stake was to mark where our new driveway would end...our house was safe! We looked at each other and grinned as if we'd won the lottery. We listened to how the property would be appraised, then about the meetings that would finalize the transfer of ownership to the highway department. The unhappy visions that we both had experienced faded away and we filled the hours during our trip home with James's plans for additions to the house and for planting new trees to replace those lost. As we left on our way home, I glanced back at the house...if a house can smile, that house did. #