



FINALLY on my own

Remembering the first place you lived on your own

Thanks to everyone who sent us stories of that first place you lived on your own. We all remember it. Most likely we were teenagers without much experience at anything, especially paying rent and utilities or dealing with roommates and neighbors. Mine was a cement-block bunker in a trailer park at the beach. Another busboy and I shared the single room with our surfboards. If the outdoor light was on when one of us came home, we knew not to go inside.

—Michael E.C. Gery

1224 Denver St., Fort Worth

I was only 14 years old, my husband 19, when we moved out of my mother’s house because I had become pregnant with my first child. We scouted Ft. Worth, Tex., for a house that was within our budget and finally found one (pictured above). It wasn’t the big house and white picket fence we wanted, but it would do.

When the house was shown to us I had already picked out my room and imagined everything I wanted in it. It was a perfect two-bedroom, one bath, small living room and small kitchen house. What more could a 14-year-old ask for?

I still remember to this day the address: 1224 Denver St. A white and blue house filled with love and a new baby boy. I am now 21 years old and my husband 26. We have three beautiful children. We have lived in many houses and now we reside in the wonderful state of North Carolina.

*Mariaelena Banuelos
Robbins, Randolph EMC*

Where we were meant to be

Growing up, it was Ma-maw and Pa-Paw’s house. At the end of a dirt road and built with my grandfather’s hands, my grandparents’ house was the first place my wife and I called home. After we were married in 1995, we moved in with a dog, a cat, a parakeet and hearts full of dreams. Our plan was to stay for about two years until we found a place of our own. Little did we know, we had already found it.

As we looked at other houses, we kept comparing them to the one that we came home to each evening. None seemed to measure up. No, the house wasn’t exactly what we would have built, but we came to realize that this was where we were supposed to be.

As anyone who has lived in an older home can attest, remodeling and repair work seem to be constant. We worked in one room, then another, installed central air and finished a play room in the attic. During the removal of a wall three years ago, I found a framing member that my grandparents had written their initials on during the construction of the house: “WCR



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You can see more “Finally On My Own” stories on our Web site. Next month we’ll publish your photos of strange-looking plants and produce. (Deadline was Jan. 15.) For the remaining themes in our “Nothing Could Be Finer” series, see page 24.

and LLR October 10, 1934.” I boxed that out and left it as a sort of “cornerstone” for our now 70-year-old house.

We’ve been in the house going on nine years now and couldn’t imagine living anywhere else. We’ve lost all of the animals that we arrived with but have added a son and a daughter, another cat and three dogs over that time. We’ve agreed that it must have been part of God’s plan for us to look after this part of Davie County for the next several years. And knowing that we’re walking in my grandparents’ footsteps makes it all that much more special.

*Jeff Beauchamp
Mocksville, EnergyUnited*

The downtown neighborhood

In 1966, this naive 18-year-old Christian farm girl went to the big city of Columbus, Ohio, to attend business college. My part-time job was for a real estate investor who also rented apartments. They had a very old, seedy looking, brick apartment building located right downtown next to all the high-rise office towers. The city, county and state government buildings, including the county jail, were right across the alley. I could work from there and walk to college. The price was right: \$75 per month furnished with all new furniture because they were my employer. So I rented this third-floor walk-up apartment.

The property manager at work told me stories about the other tenants, but I hardly believed the rumors. There were no characters like THAT in my farm community—ladies of the evening, derelicts, a male gay couple who had loud and violent fights. There was also a first-term state senator who rented the apartment for his “hotel” away from home. I was glad for his stable presence in our building and had made his friendship. He was my neighbor right across the hall.

The police came to my door one day to investigate a possible homicide of one of the gay men—they had disappeared and there was evidence of fighting and bloodshed. They told me also to be careful because there had been a county jail breakout that day.

Needless to say it was hard to fall asleep that evening, so I was in my bed reading late into the night. It was a hot summer night, so I had my window open and the radio playing to calm my nerves. All of a sudden a male figure appeared at my window standing on the fire escape, stopped at the window and started to speak—I let out the loudest blood-curdling scream that nearly knocked the senator off the fire escape. He was returning from a late session at the senate and thought he would just greet me.

We both lived to tell the story another day. I moved on to marriage and a nicer apartment in the suburbs, and the senator was elected president pro tem and majority leader of the Ohio senate for 43 years.

*Kay Watkins
Matthews, EnergyUnited*

From Hanes to the Sam Davis Hotel

I was raised on a farm, the 10th of 11 children. We didn’t have a lot of money, so I worked my way through high school. I graduated on a Friday night in May 1956 and started to work at our local Hanes plant on Monday. I didn’t have a ride to work from home, so my sister and brother-in-law rented me for \$10 a month the tiny upstairs in a farmhouse where they lived. Now I could ride to work with my sister.

I was very careful with my money and was able to buy on credit a radio, a small record player, and a bedroom suite. You can imagine how proud I was of my little “apartment.”

Later on a group of friends at work planned a trip to the Grand Old Opry, and for \$20 I could go. That money bought our ticket to the Opry and my share of a room at the Sam Davis hotel. I decided to go without telling my parents. They would have worried. Only my sister knew. But hey, I was 17 and on my own!

*Viola Shaw
Sparta, Blue Ridge EMC*



10th Street, North Wilkesboro

After graduating from UNC, I landed my first job at Wilkes Community College, down the mountain from my home in Ashe County. At first I commuted, but I was eager to live on my own.

Friends at work led me to a local doctor who had carved out three apartments in a nice home that also served as his office practice in North Wilkesboro. I took one on the lower level: one bedroom, one bath, living room and small kitchen. At \$285 per month including utilities and a short drive to work, it was just the ticket for me.

I had a wonderful year at Wilkes before other opportunities came calling, but what I remember about this apartment—with amusement and fondness—is that co-workers were quick to muse, “Whatever you say, don’t tell anybody you live on 10th Street.” (Allegedly, that’s where “certain” women used to hang out.) Whenever I was sick, I’d go upstairs to see the doctor. And a blind date brought a pretty pot of daisies to my door on the eve of Easter.

Fourteen months later, the blind date and I married. A few years later, we were back on the mountain, and before long, we were blessed with a beautiful baby girl. Now, 20 years later, I delight in this momentary reflection.

*Mrs. Bob (Karen) Powell
Fleetwood, Blue Ridge Electric*



What was I thinking?

Sometimes the biggest mistakes in life can turn out to have the best outcome. Just six months after graduating from high school, I purchased a house with the man I thought I would spend the rest of my life with. What was I thinking?

After we moved in, the company (to remain nameless) that we bought the house from still had to come and fix various things that weren't as they should be. During the move, the tile in front of the fireplace had broken. The ceiling had been put together carelessly after the move. It took two months for the interior to be fixed and an outrageous nine months to grade my yard (which was perfect timing, because the weeds were almost taller than I was.)

As fate would have it, I ended up living by myself in the house after about two months. Well, it is two years later and it almost feels like a home. The yard still needs a lot of work, but it is something that I am very proud of. In just weeks, the house will be transferred to my name, and it will be my biggest accomplishment.

*Sarah M. Smith
Snow Camp, Randolph EMC*

First job, first house

My wife and I were married in 1954 and our first residence was an upstairs apartment in Murfreesboro. Teaching at Chowan College was the first job for both of us. The apartment was unfurnished and because we had no furniture nor the wherewithal to purchase any, we got our landlady, Mrs. Lee, to find us the bare essentials: a bed, chest of drawers, sofa and dining table and chairs from their storage and, as I recall, from a couple of neighbors, too. Appliances were not furnished either so we had to purchase a stove and refrigerator on credit. Our now-furnished apartment rented for \$35 per month.

We weathered Hurricane Hazel that fall and when the chimney blew off the house during the storm, we headed for our friendly downstairs neighbor's apartment. We only lived there for one year because at the end of the school year I was drafted (Korean War).

Our makeshift apartment was not the finest place we have lived in our 50 years together, but we thought it was great and will never forget it.

*Roger Warren
Raleigh, Blue Ridge Electric*



Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we'll send you \$50. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

April 2005

Road Trip Horror Stories

Where did you go and what happened? Send pictures.

Deadline: Feb. 15

May 2005

Safety Lessons

Accidents and mishaps that taught you a safety lesson.

Deadline: March 15

June 2005

On the Farm

The best things about growing up or living on a farm.

Deadline: April 15

July 2005

The First Meal I Ever Made

What was it and how did you like it?

Deadline: May 15

August 2005

What I Learned From My Kids

Sometimes children can teach grown-ups a thing or two.

Deadline: June 15

September 2005

Celebrity Look-alikes

Photos of people who are dead-ringers for someone famous. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and at least 4 by 6 inches.

Deadline: July 15

October 2005

My Favorite Photo

North Carolina people, places, things. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and at least 4 by 6 inches.

Deadline: August 15

November 2005

It's the Thought That Counts

The dumbest gift you ever received.

Deadline: Sept. 15

December 2005

Holiday Mishaps

Those holiday plans that just didn't work out as you hoped they would.

Deadline: Oct. 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published. We retain reprint rights.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to: Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616
Or by e-mail: carolina.country@ncemcs.com.
Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com