

Memories of The Jay Darling House **by Toni Kiernan**

In 1951 my family, father Gordon Sr., mother Madeline, older brother Gordon Jr., younger brother Bruce, and of course myself, moved into the Jay Darling House on 2320 Terrace Road in Des Moines, Iowa. My parents rented the house from Jay and Penny after my father was transferred to Des Moines from the US Rubber Company. At the time of this move, I was about four years old and excited to start kindergarten in the Fall at Greenwood Elementary School with Miss Wyman. As a young girl, my brothers and I loved the idea of moving into the Darling House because to me the place seemed like "a mansion."

Just from looking at the front of the house, past the iron shaped animals, were big wooden doors just for the mail! Once inside the house, I remember being amazed that the house was already completely furnished, not just ordinary furniture but intricate and beautiful stuff in each room. The kitchen featured a very large industrial type stove with a butlers pantry on one wall full of dishes and glassware ready for the family to use. There was also plenty of seating built into the kitchen with a pentagonal tiled table that could fit our family for meals enjoyed together. The living room featured a fireplace and lots of seating. Past the kitchen and down the hallway with the phone booth and a second fireplace was where the stairs to the upstairs bedrooms were located. Upstairs, you could find what was dubbed the dressing room because it featured a full length mirror lined with lights like something straight out of Hollywood. To this day, I still remember the upstairs bathroom that was tiled in black as one of my mother's only complaints because it was so hard to keep clean. However, what I loved most was being able to have my own room separate from two brothers and my parents, all of whom were able to have their own rooms as well. There was even a guest room with its own bathroom and balcony! Coming back down the upstairs hallway, you could find another stairway that led up to the attic, which us kids thought of as being the magic place. Up in the attic there were tons of storage for Ding's personal art collections and even some saddles that we used to play wild west with. Making your way back downstairs to the first floor, I remember being in awe of the cathedral living room, which was, as the name describes, a giant living room in the shape of a cathedral. The room centered on a grand piano where my older brother and I learned to play piano, although admittedly not very well. Leading from the living room to the basement, there were hidden stairs that would rise up by the push of a button, which was magical to me as a child. As I look back much later in my life, I have come to understand that one of the most memorable things of living in the Darling House was being surrounded by Ding's artwork, which was all around and helped shape my deep appreciation for art. I have also spent my life with a deep appreciation for gardening and flowers that can probably also be traced back to Ding's personal love of flowers. As such, the driveway leading to the back was lined with lilies of the valley and the backyard itself was covered in beautiful peonies.

Some of my most favorite memories as a child are from living at the Darling House. Christmas was always an especially magical time of year because my family would get a Christmas tree so tall that my brothers and I were able to throw tinsel off the indoor

balcony, called the Eagle's nook, and right onto the top of the tree. It was my mother's favorite time of year so the house was always decorated, from glass wax stencil star and tree stencils in the windows to electric trains throughout the house. I also remember stringing up hammocks with my brothers right underneath the house in the structures we called the timbers. What seemed to us as kids to be just right, in their backyard was Racoon River. Most often with only the supervision of each other, we would venture across the railroad tracks to play at the River. Despite the lack of parental supervision, we always knew never to play in the river, which usually led us to venture into Waterworks Park for some more adventure. On the other side of the house and across Terrace Road was the Hubbell mansion where my siblings and our friends used to play in the yard. We even used to sneak out to watch the debut parties that took place there. This property would later become known, as it is today, as Terrace Hill or the Governor's Mansion where Iowa's governors now live.

As I sit here reflecting on a time so long ago in my life, I feel an immense sense of gratitude to Ding and his wife for opening their home to my family. This house marks such a wonderful time in my childhood, not just for me, but for my whole family; and I have the Darlings to thank for that.