

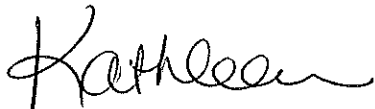
Dear Occupants,

This is a photo of me, Christmas morning, 1976. This was our second Christmas in Walkerton. I am sitting in the rec-room of the split-level house. I'm assuming the house looks basically the same. From the front door, it's a few steps up to the living room or a few steps down to the rec-room. But maybe not. So many things could have happened in the 31 years since I set foot inside.

This house is all about my mother. I see her in the backyard; gardening in the summer, tending an ice rink in the winter. Transformations. Not the house, really, but certainly everything in it. If the camera could turn around you would see an upright piano painted green – an antique green that was more olive than kelly – and a bar that my mother made out of an old dresser. She removed the drawers and built shelves, polished the top and put padding along the edges. Everything saved could be used for something else. The next Christmas, she and my brother built a dollhouse for me. She decorated it with carpet and wallpaper scraps so Barbie lived in a house that looked a lot like ours. This seemed fitting as my mother made most of Barbie's outfits using material left over from sewing projects. So, Barbie also dressed a lot like my mother.

It's not that my mother didn't fix or repair or alter things when we moved to the next house. But this was a house of change. New town, new job for my father, new friends for all of us. It was four years of arranging and rearranging as a sibling moved out and others moved through teenage life and I learned to navigate my new environment and school. My mother made it all feel rather seamless. It was a time when we couldn't afford many luxuries or a home décor that resembled anything in magazines. So she made it happen with whatever we already owned. It's only when I look back on that house that I remember that we don't always need more. Just be sure to use what you have wisely, instead.

Thank you for listening,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kathleen".