

My First Visit to Atlanta

By Marilyn Reeves

My Dad grew up in Atlanta ... Atlanta, Illinois, that is. Population plus or minus a couple thousand. As a kid, Dad was top of his class, had a paper route, and loved to go fishing with his best friend, Richard Webb – a handsome blond kid who later moved to Hollywood and became a movie star. You might remember him starring as “Captain Midnight” in 1950’s TV series. But this isn’t about him. It’s about meeting my grandparents for the first time at their home in Atlanta, Illinois.

I must have been about six years old. And tired as I was from the long two-day trip from Salida to Atlanta, I was so excited to finally meet them! We pulled up in front of a big chocolate brown, two-story house, and there they were, standing on the front porch, arms out ready to greet us. Granny Tuttle was a big, boisterous woman about twice the size of my Granddad, and she held me to her massive bosom like I was the most precious thing in the world. I loved her instantly. It took me a bit longer to warm up to Granddad. He was as quiet and shy as he was small of stature, but nice, nonetheless. He was – of all things – an undertaker, and the first floor of their home was the funeral parlor, complete with body in residence.

Their living quarters were on the second floor, up a long, sweeping staircase, much like the one featured in the thorny romance between Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara.

The house was replete with 19th Century décor – rich brocades and velvets, oriental rugs, ornate crown molding adorning the ceilings, and an old-time bathroom with claw-foot tub and tiny black and white tiles.

I sat in the kitchen watching my Granny bustle about fixing dinner, talking non-stop as she worked. She gave me a glass of brownish water that tasted as bad as it looked! I never realized how good Colorado water was until I tasted that Illinois sulfur water.

After a sumptuous dinner of roast beef, mashed ‘taters and gravy, and heaven knows how many side dishes – plus dessert! – Mom and Dad went into the living room to visit with the grandparents, leaving my sister Jan and me to roam about and explore.

Of course, I had to creep back down the stairs to view that body lying in the casket. I’d never seen a dead person before, so that was another first. Just as I leaned over to take a peek, the old grandfather clock in the hallway started to bong the hour. I made a hasty retreat back up that long staircase as fast as my little legs could carry me!

They say the first impression is the one that lasts. That little adventure sure made a lasting impression on me, and I spent the rest of our visit up on the second floor in the reassuring presence of the living.