



This is a photo of a house. It is only a house. But it was this house on Elliott Street in Athens that I had the opportunity to purchase when I was a college student, primary because of an inheritance I received when I turned 21. My father died when he 44 years old. I was 12. When I turned 21, some money came to me that I used as a down payment on this house.

In 1979, I asked several men to live with me and invited them into an adventure of welcoming strangers into our home. I had read about this in the bible (see Isaiah 58:6- 7), but had zero experience with anything like this. Indeed, not one of my housemates had any background or knowledge in what we ended up doing. Looking back, God used this house combined with our faith to start something that has rippled into the lives of many people over many years. Many.

In December 1980 I was a senior at OU. I had asked my friend Mike if he would remodel a space in the basement. We remodeled one room and added a bathroom. This is where we welcomed adults and children and provided them a temporary place to live.

I didn't really know then what I know now: That there are no laws prohibiting home owners from having guests in your home. And there are no laws limiting the number of guests you can have in your home as long as you do not charge your guests any money to stay there.

And so.... we opened what we would later call Good Works on January 1st, 1981. Darlene and I were married in September of 1981 and together we operated Good Works, welcoming strangers and providing them with a safe clean and temporary place to stay. What an adventure! We met so many interesting people and grew in our capacity to love our neighbors.

In the third year of Good Works, we provided shelter to 114 adults and children. I'm really not sure how we did that, but I know we had a lot of zeal and we were pretty naïve. We were both working part-time jobs during those early years in addition to our work with Good Works. Darlene worked for the Senior Center and I worked with Central Avenue United Methodist Church in campus ministry.

When we started, we used the language of “displaced persons” to describe the people who stayed with us. No one I knew at that time had heard the word “homeless”. We did not have the language in 1980 that we would later use to describe the people we welcomed into our home. And years later, we no longer use the word homeless in an intentional effort to separate what has happened to someone from their identity as a person. These days, we use the language of hospitality learned from our friend Christine Pohl in her book MAKING ROOM to describe the process of welcoming strangers.

On January 1st, 2022 we celebrated 41 years. As a famous rock and roll group once said “what a long strange trip it has been”. I am so grateful for years and years of the experience of God’s love and faithfulness, the kindness of those who have supported us and the g r a c e we have received from God and the body of Christ which has sustained us ALL of these years.

This photo is only a photo of a house. Looking back, I can say that through what I like to call ‘the grace of relinquishment’, God used what I “threw down” (See Exodus 4:1-3) and turned it into something far beyond my wildest dreams. I had no idea that a house combined with faith would turn into something so good for so many people.

Along the way there have been many hard and difficult seasons and situations. But I truly believe we have received a special grace to persevere in love.

What’s in your hand?