

SOULMATE HOUSE ON OAK VINE DRIVE



My two year old son trotted right into the house on Oak Vine Drive past the rough stucco wall in the family room. He knew just where to go, grabbed my hand, and dragged me along. “Mommy, this is MY room!” Ahh! The modest mass of wood and block on Oak Vine Drive found us. We’d seen many houses, but this one shook our roots and blurted out “I am your home!” I knew that this was the perfect starter home for my soul mate and me to build our lives and our family.

Just a little starter house.

Our house always seemed to rise a little taller than the other houses. Maybe our house perked up when we came home or maybe our house stood up tall with joy to welcome us back home at the end of the day. Who knows? Our house definitely stood up a little taller, like a swollen-with-pride parent, in a special, not a superior, way.

Soon, his tiny sister joined us to make four. Birthday parties, Scout meetings, holiday rituals, patio bar-b-ques, hours of swinging in the hammock, old family traditions of cookie baking, and new traditions of internet monitoring built on our foundation of our house on Oak Vine Drive. Each child planted a special tree and a small garden outside their bedroom window. His tree, the laurel oak, stood tall and unflinching, just as he did during the tough teen years. Our only native Cracker selected the non-Florida Chinese tallow. Much like the nectar of the tallow attractive to the bees, she grew sweet as honey. We planted a Ruby Red grapefruit tree and a juicy navel orange tree. Someday we’d migrate to a bigger house.

Within a few years, I sadly came to grips with the heart-wrenching reality that my soul mate husband became my starter husband. And the day he left, the foundation of our house on Oak Vine Drive shifted, leaving uncomfortable gaps in exterior and interior walls. Our house still stood a little

SOULMATE HOUSE ON OAK VINE DRIVE

taller, even after the geological studies and extensive, expensive repairs in the settling foundation that left scars.

My kids grew up in this same house. Like an endangered species, to live one's childhood in the same house is a rare phenomenon today, especially in transient Florida. Our starter house on Oak Vine Drive became our family's soul mate house

The grass in the backyard never did sprout, a tribute to the choice a parent makes between displaying a manicured lawn or having a swing set and a slip-and-slide, and playing baseball, soccer, and monkey-in-the-middle in the backyard.

Once the kids begged to move to the "cooler" section of the school district. We looked but found no options, in the meantime filling the Oak Vine Drive house with memories and stories. By the time the kids were in high school, they ignored me when I suggested leaving this huge scrapbook of our lives.

Somewhere between soccer tournaments, community service hours, tutoring, and working two jobs, my true soul mate came along. A few short months after my little girl spread her college wings, he and I ventured to the Garden of Eat'n produce market for some Ruskin tomatoes and Silver Queen corn.

Compelled by fate or by chance to drive down the street, all of a sudden we were standing in the backyard of a new house. I vividly recalled what it was like to have a house shake my roots and blurt out to us "I found you." That very day, that very day, the foundation of the house on Oak Vine Drive sank again.

My dream had been to keep our Oak Vine Drive house until the kids finished college, and pass their childhood home onto them, much like passing on Grandma's pearl earrings or Gramps' pocket watch. I held onto our house on Oak Vine Drive for over a year with renters. The house on Oak Vine Drive belongs to a family, not to non-committal renters. The house made that known with a variety of ailments. Pin hole leaks in the plumbing that evaded several experts, a series of refrigerator ills, and a ceiling light that mysteriously comes on when no one is around.

Twenty two years after my son picked out his room, or his room picked him, our house on Oak Vine Drive underwent cosmetic surgery. The painter performed his magic with drywall, texturizer, and paint. The wall where we measured heights disappeared. The crisp off-white—not pure white--textured paint covers all the bumps and imperfections of our lives on Oak Vine Drive.

Their tiny handprints remain steadfast in the concrete patio floor, the first home improvement I made. The family room with the stucco wall is now a textured crisp off-white wall of drywall perfection.

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This room, where the kids had many birthday sleepovers , including his 8th birthday party when I let him pick the VHS rental. That was the year I learned the hard way to heed those age warnings on the labels the result in fielding parents calls. Her 11th birthday sleepover, when she invited her brand new soccer team. The next morning I discovered she had lice and had to call 12 families. I thought she would be kicked off the team but they went on to play for 9 seasons, winning 5 state championships. These families truly have become lice-long friends.

The years of cutting down our own Christmas trees at the tree farm and the one very lean year that we grew our own skinny tree. Our house on Oak Vine Drive hides our secrets and our stories that we now relegate to photos and memory.

Removed from its frame as a punishment during the rough teen years, the cracked bedroom door now hangs correctly. The NFL Buccaneers bathroom was once decorated with autographed photos of our favorite sports heroes, splashed with black and red towels, and topped off with a shower curtain I sewed out of the famous black and red pirate material—purchased with a 40% off coupon of course. The bathroom now sports a stark off-white shell begging for a new personality, a new family, and new memories.

New carpeting eliminated the spot where someone learned not to iron on the highest setting directly on the carpet. Reconditioned Saltillo tile, new toilets, new ceiling fans, and the smell of mountain fresh cleaning products belie the many years and miles of memories. All packed away.

I sign on the dotted line.

I venture on a new life with my soul mate in my new soul mate house.

The house on Oak Vine Drive becomes another family's soul mate house. New people, new stories, new memories. And the house on Oak Vine Drive will always stand a little taller, a little prouder than the other houses.