“Grandpa’s Barn”

I visited this old barn on a chilly day in April of 2016 with Sandy and Tim, my barn scouts. The surrounding trees were bare, though the forsythia in front of the old boy shone bright yellow, hinting that spring was coming. Looking straight into the barn, I could see right through the top floor – the years had separated the siding, allowing light and water to penetrate – and parts of the lower level. Roof boards were also missing. The barn’s days were numbered.

I knocked on the door and met Jeff Dunlap, the gentleman who bought the farm 28 years ago. He told me that the farm house was built in 1878 and that the barn was probably in the same era, though he admitted he didn’t have a lot more information. Unfortunately, he explained that the insurance company denied coverage – due to the deterioration – and that the barn would have to be dismantled. I was glad to get to it in time. Jeff allowed me to paint it and take wood for the painting’s frame, which I did. He also let me take a few horseshoes which were lying on the barn’s floor. Jeff shoes horses.

When Tim and I walked around the barn, we noticed an incredibly long – about 40 feet – hand-hewn timber beam, a beauty that must have come from a huge tree nearby, felled by the barn builders. You don’t often see hand-hewn beams that long. I’m sure it will be re-purposed by someone.

The colossal beam and horseshoes aside, the real story about this barn came from Sandy. It was her grandfather’s. Earl McKenzie, born in Ohio in 1899, was not the first Scot from his family to live in America. Earl’s grandfather emigrated from Scotland in the early 1800s. But whether he built this barn remains a mystery. The farmhouse was built in 1878 and the barn likely dates to around that time, an era when huge trees still populated Ohio.

Sandy’s grandpa bought the farm in 1940 from the Clarence Vance family, an unusual name that is also found in nearby Adams County, the county where grandpa moved from. Twenty years later, in the 1960s, little Sandy and her many cousins used the barn to hone their basketball skills. She must have enjoyed those visits to her grandfather’s barn – visiting her relatives, farm chores, and playing her favorite sport. These days she lives vicariously through the players who wear blue and white and practice in Rupp Arena. But, even though their focus is on developing their skills and making an NBA team, I’m sure they would enjoy playing a scrimmage in grandpa’s barn. After all, basketball is basketball. Just ask Sandy.