

As the deadline for our book looms near, my co-writer and I are working to get all the photographs we need to illustrate the marriage of houseplants and design.

Just as I traveled to Austin in July to spend a week with Jenny, she was here in Ohio a couple of weeks ago and we visited local places to gather what we needed for our book projects.

It always takes me by surprise when I'm just walking along, minding my own business and a distant memory stops me in my tracks. We were meandering through the aisles at a greenhouse, trying to decide which plants we wanted for the book and there it was – a prayer plant. Known as *Maranta leuconeura* botanically, this little plant is one of those quirky wonders of nature that seems to have a personality beyond its cosmetic beauty.

Jenny may have thought I was a little strange as I expressed my affection for the prayer plant, first with, "Aww!" and then, "I remember you..." as if it were a long lost friend.

But then again, she's a gardener, so maybe not. It's not so unusual for gardeners to have memories associated with the plants they grow.

Back in the fall of 1974, I moved into an apartment in Fort Wayne where I would live during my freshman year of college at IPFW. My parents helped make my one-bedroom, galley kitchen, living space feel cozy with hand-me-down furniture from home.

Mom, always the gardener, planted a terrarium in a giant fish bowl, which took its place on an end table. Macramé hangers were all the rage and I had one holding a spider plant.

A week or two after school started, I was in Frank's (remember that store?) and I came upon a prayer plant. I wasn't familiar with it, and someone in the store explained to me how this plant would fold up its leaves at night, as if it were praying. Then in the morning as sunlight entered

the room, it would open up again. How cool was that?

The prayer plant went back with me to my apartment and sure enough, when night fell, the plant began to pray. It prayed all night and then its leaves splayed out all day long so that I could admire its spotted markings.

Flowers and plants respond to light in a variety of ways. Those that close up in darkness and open up again when exposed to light like the prayer plant does are said to be photonastic. Tulips do it. So do morning glories and dandelions.

Sunflowers respond to light in a different way (phototropism) and contrary to popular belief, do not follow the sun throughout the day, although they do open facing the morning sun and stay that way.

This is good to remember when planting sunflowers, which I learned the hard way. One year I planted a medley of colorful varieties at the very back of a flower bed which is on the east edge of our property. In order to see their blooms, we had to jump the fence and stand in the field!

Back to my college prayer plant... I don't remember what happened to it, but I wasn't such a great gardener in those days. Plants need water to survive and sometimes I'd forget to give it to them. I'm fairly certain the plant didn't survive my freshman year of college, but I did, and would go on to get my degree in dental hygiene.

Fast forward to that day two weeks ago which found me standing in front of that prayer plant in the greenhouse. Once again, I fell under its spell, partly because of the fact that it has interesting foliage, but mostly for old times' sake. I bought it, brought it home and replanted it, and it now sits on my coffee table, a nostalgic nod to an earlier time. As it says its evening prayers, so do I.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.

