

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: KELLY PALMER

Iowan goes looking for adventure

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Kelly Palmer (nee Andrews) was born in New London, Iowa, population 1,000. When she was 10 years old she moved to Brooklyn, another Iowa town of about the same size. Like most of the girls in Brooklyn, she was married immediately after high school — what else was there to do?

After a few years and two daughters, the marriage ended, and Palmer managed to get a fresh start by going to the University of Iowa for a bachelor's degree in art. After graduation she discovered finding a job for an art major in Iowa was not easy, and Palmer felt the need to relocate and begin a new life.

A friend told her about Houston with its growing

population. The Space Center was in its heyday, and Palmer came down to get the lay of the land. Using the city bus to get around she applied for jobs, found a place to live, and on a sunny June day in 1969 loaded her possessions in a U-Haul trailer, put a hitch on her 9-year-old

Chevrolet and headed for adventure in the big city.

It took her most of three days to drive the 1,100 or so miles in that car pulling the U-Haul, with a top speed of 45 mph, but this feisty and determined redhead made it. Sears was starting an interior design program with one designer to serve the whole city of Houston through its Main Street store, and Palmer got the job.

She made lots of new friends and gained some valuable experience, but the pay was not great, so she put on her business hat and took a supplementary job at a local bank.

Soon she was offered a permanent, part-time job at the bank, but she had decided she wanted something with a little more panache. She moved to one of Houston's then top-line furniture stores, Stowers. There she was one of a design staff. When she had built a substantial clientele, and when the business climate was right, she started her own company, Kelly Palmer and Associates.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TREEMONT

Kelly Palmer is original from Iowa and has been in Houston since 1969. She has lived at Treemont since July 2008.

Palmer was now in her element. She found a beautiful high-rise apartment on Bellaire Boulevard, moved in and decorated it, and began the life she had dreamed of. She entertained frequently with dinner parties and rooftop garden parties, took an active role in her church, and enrolled in classes at what is now the College of Biblical Studies.

"Houston Style" was a slick, high-fashion magazine considered Houston's answer to the "Architectural Digest." It featured Palmer in an article with pictures of homes she had

lone. The story brought her new clients, and business boomed.

In July 2008, health problems began to plague her, and she became critically ill as a result of over-exposure to radiation. While recovering, she developed a blood clot in her lung. She spent months in the hospital, after which she found it necessary to move to where she could get immediate attention if necessary. Her choice was Treemont, and so she left her high-rise home of 27 years and joined the contented residents of Treemont.

Last year her daughter Sherry gave her a 75th birthday party with 85 of Palmer's closest friends for dinner.

They ranged from past clients, associates and contractors who had worked with her during the years and had become lifetime friends to former neighbors at her high-rise, to church friends and fellow Overcomers, to newer friends from Treemont. And a good time was had by all.

She loves to entertain and manages to do it well in the limited space she has here. She likes to visit with people, and has made friends worldwide in her extensive travels.

She put her own personal stamp to the old saying, "When life hands you a lemon, you make lemonade and have a party."

This small-town Iowa girl has broken out of the mold, sought and found adventure, attained a professional niche of her own, and now has settled into a satisfying retirement, happy in her own skin.

— Lois McCall, Treemont Tattler