

WHY I CAME BACK TO IOWA

# Iowa or Bust!

*They followed their dream 2,000 miles along the Oregon Trail...east to Iowa.*

By Sherry Crawford

MOST FOLKS might say Joe and Terie Wehage had it made living in Portland, Oregon.

Portland is about an hour's drive to the Pacific Ocean beaches to the west—and an hour's drive to the majestic Cascade Range of mountains to the east.

Joe, a successful mortgage broker and president of his own company, was busy. Very busy.

But...Terie was feeling a gentle but undeniable tug from Iowa. Ironic, because 150 years ago people were

feeling the urge to "go west, young man".

Terie had lived in Fairfield for 6 years as a child, and that's all it took. There was something about that Midwest comfort zone that stuck with her when she and her family moved to Portland when she was 15.

Three decades later, those fond memories had her wondering if Iowa might be a better place for her own family.

"I had wonderful memories of growing up in Iowa," Terie

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*"Vinton looked just like a Norman Rockwell painting..."*

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says. "I yearned for that for our own children—a simpler way of life."

When Joe realized that with today's technology he could probably do his job anywhere, the stage was set.

Three years later, the Wehages are happily settled in Vinton—2,000 miles to the east of Portland in a town of their dreams. Now a family of nine (including two foster children), they have renovated a beautiful Victorian home on First Avenue.

### Never Been There Before

So why Vinton—a town they'd never laid eyes on before?

"We've never been afraid of trying new things," explains Joe, 53. "We had a wonderful life back there, but Portland is a fairly liberal town. And Terie felt that I needed to ratchet down a little bit, work-wise."

Terie, 52, used to work in real estate and with that experience began searching for Iowa towns and available Victorian homes via the Internet. She narrowed the search down to Sioux City, Sac City and Vinton.

In January 2007, they spent 2 days visiting Sioux City, which was too big for their tastes...and Sac City, which was a bit too small. It was late in the day as they neared Vinton, so they stopped at a motel in nearby Urbana.

Joe was struck by the warm hospitality they found there. "I thought, 'Wow, if everyone's like this, this is great,'" he recalls.



**VICTORIAN CHARM** of this old house isn't the only thing that attracted the Wehage family (left). They found the town of Vinton just as charming.



Terie adds, "I thought, 'Welcome to Iowa!'"

But it was Vinton that captured the Wehages' hearts and sealed the deal. "We drove over the river bridge into town, and it was just like a Norman Rockwell painting," Terie explains.

Then she fell in love with the Victorian house she'd identified—despite all of the work it needed. Furthermore, the town felt friendly, it was clean and had a brand-new high school. The combination won them over, and the Wehages moved in July 2007.

"Life is short," Joe says. "What's the worst that could happen? We could always move back to Portland."

### Settled in Nicely

But that's not likely. Since moving, the Wehages have renovated the house, yard and pool. An old carriage house/garage now houses Joe's office.

Their kids' transition to a new school district in the fall of 2007 was eased by the fact that *all* students faced new school buildings...a domino effect of the new high school opening.

That's not to say the kids weren't skeptical of the move. "At first, I thought they were joking," says 14-year-old Raechel.

But Mom and Dad's craving for safety, friendliness and more mainstream values won out. "We didn't feel comfortable letting our kids go biking or walk alone anywhere in Portland," Joe says. "Here, you run into friends everywhere."

Alysha, 15, now sees the advantages of small-town life. "You get to know people easily," she acknowledges. "You know everyone in your class."

Portland is a city of well over 500,000 people. Vinton has a population of just over 5,000—plus nine happy newcomers.

"It's been a good fit for us," says Joe. 🏡

**WHO'S NEXT?** If you've returned to Iowa after living elsewhere—or know of someone who has—share the story with our readers. Send a letter to: "Why I Came Back to Iowa", *Our Iowa*, 1606 Golden Aspen Drive, Suite 109, Ames IA 50010.

Or send an E-mail to: [editors@OurIowaMagazine.com](mailto:editors@OurIowaMagazine.com) and put "Why I Came Back to Iowa" in the subject line.