When Mel and Toastie Racy decided they wanted a smaller house, Toastie had an idea what she was looking for.

“I have always wanted a bungalow,” says Toastie. “I just love bungalows.”

She and Mel had raised five children in a magnificent Gothic style home on NW 3rd (it’s one of the other homes on the tour this year).

“We really loved that house,” Toastie says. It didn’t have enough bedrooms, but the woodwork was gorgeous and bunkbeds made it possible to fit everyone in. Her youngest was weeks old when they moved in.

It was one of the homes on the very first homes tour, in 1977. Years passed and the children grew up.

“All my kids were gone. I had taken care of that house for 20, 24 years and I just wanted small,” she says. “I wanted to downsize.”

She and Mel sold the house and moved into a rental. One day they drove past the bungalow at 107 NW 10th.

“Mel goes, ‘There’s a bungalow that’s on the corner. That might be nice.’ And I said, ‘It isn’t even for sale!’ He’s a salesman. He says, ‘Everybody will sell sometime.’”

The house definitely had curb appeal.

“We both liked the outside,” Toastie remembers. “We looked in the windows. The floor was in horrible condition.”

That didn’t slow Mel down. When he contacted the owner, she allowed as how she actually had been thinking about selling.

“Mel said yes before we even came in,” Toastie says with a bit of a head shake.

The view through the window was only a taste of what lay ahead. Toastie remembers the reaction of their son, who was eager to see where his parents had bought to replace the house he grew up in.

“Are you two nuts?” he exclaimed. “Mom! Dad! What are you doing? Why did you buy this thing?”

Toastie concedes the reaction was in some ways justified. The owner had rented it for years, and tenants had not always been easy on it.

“It was awful,” she says. “It was not taken care of. It was just in horrible shape. It was just a shell, really.”

But she recognized that the house retained many of its original charms, in particular its many windows. Light floods into the house. She knew that if the wall that enclosed the front room were removed, it would transform the house.

“I said to Mel, ‘We’re going to open this up, from front to back.’”

The house was built by Hiram Akers, a real estate broker who lived nearby, in the 900 block of North Buckeye. The exact year of construction could not be determined because property tax records for that period are housed at the Dickinson County Historical Society and public access to the documents has been blocked since this summer.

However, online maps of Abilene show there was no house at that location in 1912, but by 1917 the house has been built.

In 1920 Akers sold the house to Oscar Dentzer, who was in the grocery business. Dentzer in turn sold the house to C.L. Brown in 1929. Brown, one of the most influential entrepreneurs in Abilene’s history, oversaw a business empire that spawned the company that today is Sprint. Just three years earlier, he had built four Southwestern style stucco houses for his executives (one is on this year’s tour).

After Brown’s death in 1935, his widow, Maud, sold the home to Leon and Evelyn McNulty; it remained in the McNulty family until the Racys bought it in 2005.

Toastie’s vision proved to be sound. After repairs and remodeling, her son agreed that the house really is very attractive.

Like most of the homeowners on the tour this year, Toastie did not grow up in Abilene. She was born in Saginaw, Michigan, grew up in Topeka, but as a child in a military family lived in other places in between.

“My dad was in the war. He was captain of a ship” she explains. “He went to New Orleans to prepare for the invasion of Japan. In later years he said, ‘And we were all prepared not to come home. We were going to do it for our country.’ But while he was there preparing, they dropped the atomic bomb so he didn’t have to go to Japan.”

After the war, her father got a job on Wall Street and the family moved to the New Jersey shore. And that’s where she got her nickname.

“I was down on the shore every day, and they would say, ‘Look at little toastie.’”