

A Visit to Monroe's House: Gail and Judy's Adventure

Special thanks to Judy Kaiser and Gail Roulet

The façade of Monroe's House is shown three times in the film: in the gripping Riverton Thanksgiving scene, and later when Ennis picks up, and then drops off, Alma, Jr. Located in the charming Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Calgary, the house is easy to find and has become a popular *Brokeback* tourist destination.

In August 2007, Gail Roulet and Judy Kaiser had the good fortune of meeting the owner of the house and learning about the filmmakers' work there. They have generously agreed to share their experience here.



Monroe's House looms as Ennis turns away Alma, Jr.

Judy, how did you and Gail happen to meet the owner of "Monroe's House"?

The glory of the Canadian Rockies, and the emotion of seeing the filming sites for many of the *Brokeback Mountain* scenes, had us tired and completely satisfied Wednesday evening, our last night in Alberta. But there was still a bit of dusky light left and, on a whim, we decided to drive past Monroe's house, just because we could.

We found the street, and next the correct block. I could see the tip of the gable from the intersection. Excitement took over. "There it is, there it is!" I screeched, while Gail surveyed both sides of the street for a place for me to pull over. As we drove up, we saw an unexpected issue, quite possibly a problem: the owner was mowing the lawn. After a short time, she looked up at our rental car idling in front of her home and shut off the mower.

"Would you mind if we took a picture of your house?" asked Gail. The woman shook her head in agreement.

"It was in *Brokeback Mountain*, the movie," she said.

“We know. That’s why we’re here!” The woman indicated for us to wait five minutes until she ran her electric mower over the last of the lawn, and then she would be out of the way of our camera shots.



Monroe’s House from the curb

We wanted to get a good shot of the porch where Junior sat waiting for her daddy to pick her up.

Did she tell you anything about the making of the film?

When she pulled the mower to the back yard we began snapping and shooting, edging ever closer. When the owner came back out she started telling us about the filming procedure, and how the crew had to get permission from the neighbors on each side of her house to put “snow” on their roofs for the Thanksgiving scene, where Ennis ran out of the house after Alma’s “Jack Nasty” remark. That memorable scene was shot at 11 p.m. on Friday, May 28th, 2004.

Only part of the Thanksgiving scene was shot there.

The dinner table and kitchen scenes were not filmed here, she said, but instead a house in nearby Scarborough. Heath only came in and stood in the foyer so they could film him slamming the door. The owner told us that she had been reimbursed for damage done to her storm door when it slammed back against the house, due to Heath using too much force on one or more takes of that scene.



This door was damaged for the sake of art.

She shared other details?

She said the process began when she received a letter stating that the film company would like to use her house in the making of a movie. What convinced her to do it “in spite of the subject matter” was that Ang Lee was involved with the project and she had long been a fan of his work. She proudly recalled that after she had agreed, Lee himself had come to her house to look around and make sure it was the right house for his movie. Both of the neighbors had also agreed, but Ang thought her property afforded the best opportunity for his characters to show up well.

They added only a few props for the filming. One was the yard lamp. The two flower boxes on the porch railing were originally meant to be attached to the front window but didn’t show up well at the camera angle, so they moved them to the railing.



The yard lamp is a prop; the rest is real!

She said they added a goose or something to the left side of the door, and they took a white and red sticker off her mailbox because it did not fit the time period. They replaced it after the filming was completed.

Two ceramic flower pots are now on her front steps. They were not used in the movie, but someone from the crew had broken two plastic flower pots she had in the back yard and they replaced them with the nicer ones in spite of her protests that they weren't worth the trouble.

She told us about the crew replacing her front blinds to match the blinds in the Scarboro house where they filmed Junior, Jenny, and Monroe watching TV while Alma confronted Ennis in the kitchen.

Was there much local attention to the production?

She said that in 2004 the *Calgary Herald* had kept readers notified of filming being done in the city on a "little independent film." On March 3, 2006, the magazine section of that paper was devoted to the filming sites of *Brokeback Mountain*. In the owner's words, by then they knew it was "huge."¹

As she told us these details and answered our questions it was getting quite dark, and the mosquitoes were making a feast of my arms and legs. About the tenth time I slapped at a biting critter, she invited us in.



Judy Kaiser at Monroe's House
The house number seen in the film is the real thing.

¹ Jacquie Moore, "The Real *Brokeback Mountain*," *Swerve Calgary Herald*, 3 Mar. 2006: 18-28.

She went into another room to get the section of the newspaper to show us and came out saying “I have an extra copy, if you’d like to have it,” as she handed it to me. Then this generous woman pulled out personally autographed pictures of Heath and Jake to show us. She hadn’t even had them framed yet.



Gail checks out Alma, Jr.'s waiting spot

You had quite a visit.

Gail and I had an incredible and informative visit with a gracious woman, and all because we decided to add just one more film site to our agenda at the last moment.

Thanks for sharing with us!