

## THE HANSEN HOUSE DOLL HOUSE

The construction of what eventually came to be called the Hansen House doll house did not begin in the basement of an apartment house in New York City; however, it was completed there. Instead, it actually began when I attended Stuyvesant High School. At that time the school's curriculum was designed to prepare the students for advanced studies and careers in science and engineering. Beside the usual core courses it included various lab and work shop classes. I enrolled in several of these classes including metal working and wood working because I enjoyed working with my hands. That enjoyment continues to the present, not in manual pursuits but in writing for pleasure.

In the metal working class I built a Morse code key from raw brass materials, even shaping the small screws on a metal turning lathe. In the wood working class I constructed several misc. objects and then finally a small house which was referred to as a model home. It was built to scale and because of its size posed somewhat of a problem when finished and carried home in the subway. Could I be accused of stealing a house and using a subway train for my get away vehicle?

Right out of school, sans those advanced studies, (which would come later in life) I became the handyman of an apartment house on Madison Avenue that had a large work shop in the basement out of which I worked. At that time, the magazine LIFE was being published and very popular with readers pictures with their stories. In one of the issues they featured a house of the future that could be built for \$10,000.00, a price intended for a home for families with more than a moderate income. Perhaps in dreaming of my own future the house intrigued me and I sent away for its layout plans at a cost \$5.00, which was almost two day's wages for me; a sign of the times. I started planning to built it in my spare time. It was not a kit so I had to cut all the pieces from large lumber using a table power saw. I was pleased seeing the house in its various stages of construction; in time it was finished and I was proud of my accomplishment. I set the house up in a winter snow scene and took photographs that I sent to LIFE; however they never acknowledged or replied to me. I was not discouraged; I felt good about the house and it remained in a corner of the shop where I could look at it from time to time and continue my dream.

Shortly afterward, a Mr. Hans Hansen became superintendent of the apartment house and I was then working for him. He noticed and commented about the house but that was as far as it went for a while. I don't know what prompted Mr Hansen but he soon began talking of building the same house but of twice the size. He did not mention the purpose of building nor what its final disposition would be; it was possible he did not have any definite plans for it, at the time. We both saw it as an enjoyable pastime. I was enthusiastic and eager about such a joint project so retrieved my plans and work began. There was be a major difference in construction between this house and the previous two. This one would have rooms including a kitchen and bathroom, complete with fixtures, whereas the other houses were just empty shells, lacking any interior work.

It was now a matter of converting the scale from the smaller house to one twice as large; not a very difficult task. Here again, it was necessary to cut every piece of lumber from large planks. As time consuming as that might seem, we were thankful that we did not have to go out and cut down a tree for the wood. Another factor determined how quickly the house would be built. Mr Hansen was a man of integrity so we would not work on the house during regular working hours; it would be an after hours, spare time job. There were rare times when Mr Hansen's integrity may

have faltered, but not with regard to building the house. As an example, he enjoyed playing table tennis so we constructed a table for playing and we did use some Company time; however, very little. You might say that its purpose was to improve employee moral which would contribute to increased production. It was always easy to compromise your standards just enough to meet your needs; we always went away better employees after a heated game.

I often worked on the house in the evenings and over weekends when Mr Hansen departed to work on a large house he was renovating up in Oakland NJ. As the building superintendent he was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; however, he could also designate the responsibility to another responsible person. That was where I came in. To meet all the responsibilities of this trust I set up a room with toilet and shower in the basement where I lived a good part of my life at that time. This arrangement met with the approval of my family mainly because there were more than enough people already living at home. One important reason for full coverage at the apartment house was the erratic performance of the elevator. Without notice it would decide to stop working and it was necessary to enter the cramped switch and power room to reset the mechanism. I always had the fear of electrocution but it had to be done and I survived.

During those weekends when I was 'in full charge' I spent much of the time cutting the 1/4" pieces of wood for wall studs. It was tedious work and necessary to stay alert; those power saw blades are useful for wood projects but also quite treacherous to life and limb if one is not especially careful. Fortunately, I always kept the blade recessed which was the best position for small work and less likely to cause a major injury. One day the inevitable happened. A small piece of wood jammed and flew hitting me in the eye. I fell in the direction of the rapidly moving blade. These injuries are the kind that happen so quickly you don't feel them at the moment of contact. When I recovered, I saw blood dripping from my throbbing hand. Upon closer examination, I noted a good part of my thumb hanging by a small piece of tissue. I quickly wrapped my hand in a towel and headed to the office of Dr Reisman on the main floor above. I knew he would be home because he was retired and treated only the occasional retired patient from the Railroad Company. I was taken into his home surgery where he proceeded to cleanse and stitch the hanging thumb section back in place. Sporting a bandaged hand and a black eye, I returned to the shop to continue working with just my left hand but not on the table saw. Soon the house began to take shape so it was necessary to keep it covered with a large tarp when not being worked on. We did not want to give any snooping management people the impression that we were spending Company hours on a recreation project. Near the final stage of construction Mr Hansen's talents really came into play. He cut and carved miniature kitchen and bath fixtures and together we wallpapered some rooms with silk fabric.

When we worked, side by side, some times with little conversation, I likened it to a father and son jointly enjoying a new toy. They were happy times. I often thought of Mr Hansen as a father figure and mentor. He had a way of bringing out the best and most in people. The plans we had at our disposal were merely intended to illustrate layout and design. They did not include construction details so we had to draw on past experiences. I, from my similar work and Mr Hansen from actual work experience. We were a very compatible and effective team.

I believe it was about this time that Mr Hansen began thinking about where the house might find a home. His renovation work in Oakland was progressing well and there were plans to use it as a boarding residence where guests could spend a week or two of their vacation. He called it HANSEN HOUSE.. At that time the Hansen's had a young daughter, Sonya who at times visited the shop, as work progressed. This six year old's smile confirmed that she approved of the project and also a belief that the house would eventually be hers. When the house was finished it somehow found its way to the Hansen House in New Jersey. By that time I had moved on to bigger and greener (\$\$\$\$) pastures. We were at war and Uncle Sam needed me for tasks other than building doll houses. I eventually exchanged my overalls for a U.S. Navy uniform.

Prior to departing from the handyman job I also made several wooden lawn chairs for use at Hansen House. They were well received and I was aware that they survived many years, despite heavy usage and weather. In fact, I used them when I was a frequent guest and made myself

useful at Hansen House.

I could envision the completed house being tied down on the top of Mr Hansen's large car and the travel route planned so as to not to meet up with any low highway overpasses. Other passing cars probably thought it was a parade float that got lost. When it arrived in Oakland it was placed on an elevated abandoned well in the front of the house. Hansen House was located on the corner of the main road through Oakland and on a curve leading to Pompton Lakes. I am sure it attracted the attention of motorists who drove by and could not avoid seeing this impressive display. It was shortly afterward that another daughter, Evelyn, was added to the Hansen family and years later Sonya's two daughters Lynn and Dianne arrived on the home scene and also enjoyed The Hansen House Doll House.

In the final accounting, no one experienced more enjoyment than I for the opportunity to work with Mr Hansen on a project that eventually brought pleasure to many people.....truly a labor of love..... Sidney a.k.a. Skolsky

PS. Although Mr Hansen has passed on, I have maintain a friendly and affectionate relationship with the entire extended Hansen family. They have been family to me for more than sixtyfive years.

*Sidney*