

## **Adventures in McCloudland**

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Chapter 22

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The next morning began like all mornings would for the next several months. The trucks pulled into the rear lot at 7a.m. Workers began to unload gear and set up for the day. Radios were turned on.

Ray brought in a crew of seven, including Jeff, who pitched in and worked hard doing heavy, dirty tasks. They started in the basement. By the end of the second day all the basement library shelving had been removed along with any other scrap wood and debris that had been there. The old apartment in the basement was also demolished. There was a mountain of wood in the middle of the room that covered half the floor and nearly reached the ceiling. All that was left were pipes running the length of the room at the ceiling with asbestos covering.

The work days added up and spaces were opening up as partition walls came down. They'd use an electric tool I had never seen, a Saws-All, to cut a partition wall at the top, sides and bottom. They'd give it a good shove and down it would come with a building-shaking thunderous thud flinging lath and plaster everywhere.

A supply problem quickly developed with the blades for the Saws-Alls, though. The crew was averaging 12 blades a day. McCloud Building Supply quickly exhausted their supply and Mt. Shasta was scoured in the search for a never ending need for new blades. Calls went out to Oregon and the Bay Area for replacements.

And the yard began to take the look of a dump. Tubs, toilets, urinals, laundry sinks, old washers, water heaters, janitor sinks, basins, pipe, wire, wood, lath and plaster walls and general debris were sorted into piles of like things. An old dump truck had its station near the basement exit and began regular runs to the dump.

It was November. It was cold so the workers had big propane burning blasters pointed into their work area. I'd pass in front of it and nearly burn my legs, but just a few inches off to the side of the blast, it was freezing cold. The crew's breath hung in the air as

they worked hard. The radio station of choice blasted oldies and they often accompanied Teresa Brewer or Fats Domino as they boisterously sang along. The project assumed a routine of activity and noise level that was punctuated by thuds as large things hit the floor, or the giant air compressor monitoring itself, noisily turning on and off as needed, hissing and puffing. Mid-morning noon and mid-afternoon would yield a surprising instant silence as the workers turned off their noisy equipment and took their breaks. The days were filled with activity and progress.

The nights, however, were 18 hours long and very lonely. The crew left at 4 and stillness would immediately shroud the building. Darkness would complete the job of isolation by 4:30. I'd drop something in the microwave and then wonder how I could fill the next 14 hours.

Jeff had made fast friends and spent most evenings away from the hotel. He had converted one of the guest rooms off the rear lobby into his space and spent as little amount of time there as possible. There was no power or water in the room so cords for an electric blanket and light were strung from my rooms. If he needed to use the bathroom at night he'd have to walk through a freezing lobby.

The little electric space heaters couldn't do the job of keeping my three rooms warm so I'd end up turning on the electric blanket and crawling in. It wasn't very long before we had a kerosene Monitor heater installed next to my bedroom. We also got cable installed so I could watch TV. I appreciated both.

Lee and I would talk at least every evening on the phone. I'd ask if there were any bites on the house. (The answer was always, "No.") He'd tell me how quiet it was in that big house. Sure. A two floor, four bedroom house. Try four floors and 93 rooms of pure darkness. I'd often get up in the middle of the night and sit at the computer creating our stationary, envelopes, business cards, reservation cards, business plans, press releases, garden plans, and marketing ideas. And wait for the weekend.

Lee would get in around midnight on Fridays. I worried about him on the road for five hours after a full day working in San Francisco. I knew the traffic getting out of the Bay Area was awful. He'd try new ways to get here (Highway 580 through Tracy, 80 through Pinole and Vallejo or 680 through Walnut Creek and Concord) trying to cut a few minutes off the time it would take.

It was always a great relief to hear the van pull up.

Saturday morning we'd take a ceremonial walk through the building while Lee commented on everything that had been accomplished. He'd shake his head at the rotten floor boards under the bathrooms, or comment that Ray was doing a fine job. We'd go down the street to Tommy's Soda Shoppe and order a big breakfast and get to

know some of the local folks. Then there were meetings to review the drawings, or meetings to discuss the progress and issues. Lee would struggle to finish so he could head back home to Oakland just after lunch on Sunday. I'd wait for his call that he had arrived safely.

And the weeks went by.