

Adventures in McCloudland

By Marilyn J. Ogden

Chapter 25

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In January, 1994, we ran into trouble. Ron had determined that the demo work that was going on could properly be classified as “maintenance” and did not need a permit. However, he did prepare a description of the Phase I activities and sent them with an architect in his office, a young woman named Debra, to the Building Department marked “advisory.” He included the nearly finished drawings of Phase II that would need approval soon.

The Chief Inspector shot back quickly at Debra that “no way are the Ogdens going to start this project. They better not be doing any work in there until they get a permit and an engineer’s report.” He called Ron while Debra was still standing there telling him “absolutely no work was to be started.” It was reported later to us that immediately following that conversation, the Inspector issued an edict for anyone within earshot that “that old hotel will open over my dead body.”

A two year tug-of-war began. The war was partly fueled by the appointment of Debra by Ron to head the project. After the first skirmish, we approached Ron and asked if he thought Debra was the right person to head the project. Given my own first contact with the Building Department and their subsequent knee-jerk reaction to Debra, I asked Ron to reconsider assigning a woman to the project. He assured me it would be fine. Ron had previously been on the Planning Commission and had good working relationships with many of the county employees involved in construction. But I think he overestimated his sphere of influence and totally underestimated their zeal. He also overestimated Debra’s ability, to manage such a big, fast moving project at her 20 hours per week status. Mistakes were made that would cost us dearly.

Ron, Ray, Lee and I regrouped. “Not start the project?” In truth the windows had all been removed and repositioned. Partition walls between the guest rooms had already been taken down. All the bathrooms and fixtures were gone. Ray’s crew was in the

process of opening the floors where the bathrooms had been and repairing water damage. Additionally, the crew had found many joists which had been cut to accommodate the bathroom pipes to the point that their structural value had been compromised. We had them all reinforced and as good as new.

The added-on rooms on the north and south porches of the first and second floors had already been removed and temporary railings were in place. At the north end the major support of the corner of the building was found rotting and replaced. (In a move I hadn't wanted to watch, they had jacked up the corner of the building, held it there while they installed the new support.)

Phase I had not only begun, it was nearly finished. The Phase II drawings were nearly complete and Ray was beginning to make cost estimates.

The county had ordered the building engineered and tested with the room partitions removed to withstand 90 mile per hour winds. The report would cost thousands of dollars and at least a month of lost time. But we were told it had to be done. Ron called an engineer he had worked with before in Los Angeles. The fact that Los Angeles had just suffered their worst quake in 50 years, and "earthquake resistant buildings" had folded up with entire floors disappearing should have caused us pause. Engineers were nervous. Lawsuits hung in the air like huge clouds. There was talk of millions of dollars in damages leveled at "the engineers who designed these things and county officials who approved them."

The engineer arrived at the site within a week and spent two days measuring everything. Then he left and we waited.

Two weeks later we, and the county, received his report. Because we were removing the interior room walls we'd have to increase the load carrying capabilities of all remaining walls in the hotel. We would need to apply shear walls throughout the building from basement through the attic. I didn't know what a shear wall was, but the looks on Ron's and Lee's faces, told me this was not good.

"A shear wall," Lee explained. "is the application of a high grade plywood to the studs of an existing wall. It adds stability and strength. We have to put these walls around the basement, on every inside partition wall remaining on three floors, and the inside of the exterior walls on three floors." It meant also that we would have to remove all the lath and plaster and previously blown-in insulation from the remaining walls so the plywood could be attached directly to the studs. Then we'd need to add new insulation and wall board.

The fact that the walls which had been removed were short non-bearing partitions made no difference to the engineer. He wanted to make sure. We'd also need the foundation tested for strength. This place had been standing for 80 years. It made no sense.

We called a concrete testing firm and they sent someone out to bore big holes in the foundation and test it. Two weeks later he called and declared that it had passed, barely.

Meanwhile, we had to seriously look at the scope of the project. With much reluctance we scrapped the third floor and pub in the basement. There simply wasn't going to be enough money. We'd restore two floors with seventeen rooms and our residence. Our plan for a May, 1994 opening was becoming remote.

Many people ask, "What ever happened to your plan for a pub and eatery in the basement?" I tell them we got shear walls instead.