CHAPTER 9

It must have been about noon when I heard the pounding on the kitchen door. I staggered out of bed and hollered down the stairs, "just a minute!" I put on my bifocals and then hurriedly pulled my chinos over my Scooby Doo boxers, a pair the grandkids got me last Christmas. It was supposed to be a joke but they were comfortable and the only clean ones I had left in my drawer.

My feet hurt and my back was stiff as I went down the stairs, this was nothing new. At my age pain, especially "getting going pain" is a daily occurrence. As I neared the bottom I saw John through the window. I trudged across the kitchen floor and opened the door.

"Looks like you had a heck of a night", he said with a laugh as he grinned at me with his perfect set of store-bought choppers. "Did I wake you up?" he asked.

"No", I lied, "I was just lying in bed, finishing the book I started last night."

"I've got a load of materials in the truck," he said. "Now that you're back from your little fishing trip, it's time we got started on the basement laundry room!"

"Great, give me a second to put on my shoes and grab a quick bite to eat," I said.

"Sure, while you're doing that I'll start hauling stuff downstairs."

I turned and opened the fridge and grabbed some of the eggs and milk I'd bought the night before. I whipped up some scrambled eggs, made some cinnamon toast, poured a glass of orange juice and devoured the meal in about two minutes. I went back upstairs and brushed my teeth, washed my face and put on a flannel shirt, baggy jeans, and shoes. I had to laugh as I pulled on my Wal-Mart deck shoes. Maybe Henry and I were more alike than I thought!

Ten minutes later I joined John in the basement. He was measuring out the wall lines for the laundry room. "Pete, grab that chalk line and help me snap some lines for the walls", he said, "By putting the room in this corner will only need two walls. Since this is right below the kitchen we can tie into the plumbing from the pipes above us."

It was great to have a friend like John. He was a virtual master of anything to do with wood or residential construction. While other guys were watching TV sports on weekends, John was glued to the do-it-yourself channel. The only difference between him and most other guys watching the channel was his commentary. It was usually a brutal critique of the TV carpenters. Most of their skills paled in comparison to John's.

"Isn't it funny?" he said, "this house has been here for nearly a hundred and thirty years and no one ever bothered to put in a laundry room. I wonder why?"

"Maybe they were wealthy enough to have it done by someone else," I commented, "I heard there used to be a Chinese laundry down on First Street"

John said that could have been the arrangement with the original owners but that laundry closed up in the 1930s. He'd heard his parents talk about the rumors of an opium den in the basement of the building. John had grown up in Snohomish and knew much of the local history.

"John?" I asked, as I pulled the chalk line tight, "How much do you know about this house?"

I pulled up the taunt braided cord, which was coated with a fine layer of powdered chalk and let it go. As it sapped down on the concrete it left a perfect, straight red line on the floor.

"Well, it was the first house on Third Street," he said, "being here on the corner of 3rd and Union put it at the top of the highest hill in the old part of town." He continued to tell me that it was one of the first houses built in Snohomish. "There were other houses built in this neighborhood," he added, "but most of them were poorly constructed and were replaced over

the years. Most of the homes that are still here were constructed between 1910 and 1925. That's why the style of this house is different. This lot is over an acre; most of the other homes are on quarter acre lots. When this house was built it got its water from a well. As the city grew and was incorporated, utilities were added. The lots didn't need to be so big since outhouses, cesspools, and wells were no longer required."

"Isn't it interesting that this home is in such good shape after all these years?" I commented. "Don't you think the slate roof and heavy basement walls are a factor in that?"

"Of course," he said, "A firm foundation and watertight roof will help a house last centuries. I've seen wooden homes in Europe that are hundreds of years old and people still live in them."

"What do you know about the people that have lived here?" I asked.

"There have been a few rumors over the years," he said, "Most of the owners were a bit different but very nice. My folks used to go to church with the last old couple that lived here, I think their names were Henry and Violet Jorgansen. They were great contributors to the church. My dad said he and Henry helped on a few service projects together. The old museum downtown was one of their doings. Have you been there?"

"Yes, I have," I answered "We used to take the kids down there when they were in elementary school. They have a wonderful collection of Native American artifacts; in fact I'm told its one of the best in the Northwest!"

"That's right," he answered, "My dad said most of those items were donated by Henry. Dad said the museum board would discuss an item they wanted for their collection and within a few days Henry would show up with it. Sometimes he said the items seemed like they were almost new, even though they all knew they were very old."

John started to lay out the wall members, first the pressure treated bottom plate, then the studs and finally a single top plate. We attached the upper top plate to the floor joists above us and then nailed the wall together and tipped it up and nailed the two top plates together. The bottom plate was trued up to the chalk line and secured to the floor with concrete nails. We worked through the rest of the afternoon until the framing was completed.

“Not bad for a couple of over the hill, old fat guys,” I said.

John laughed and invited me over to his house for dinner. Even though I was dead tired, I accepted and after a quick shower and clean change of clothes headed over to his place.

CHAPTER 10

Pat met me at the door and told me to join John in the family room. He was sitting in his big recliner with a glass of lemonade watching TV. There was a big oscillating fan in front of the corner window turned on to high speed. It was an unusually hot day for Western Washington. Because our summer days are normally cool, most homes lack air-conditioning. On the few hot days, we normally survived, as John was doing, with a cool drink and a gentle, mechanical breeze.

John was watching the science channel. The program was one of those "what if and how it might be possible" shows about time travel. Pat entered the room with a big glass of lemonade; handed it to me and told us dinner would be ready in about fifteen minutes. John grunted a "huh-huh" as he nodded his head in acknowledgment of her presence. His eyes never left the TV.

"John, you ever wonder what it would be like to time travel?"

"Yup" he answered, "Sometimes I'd like to go back and live my life again, only do some things a little different."

"Like what?"

"Do you remember what it was like when we were kids in grade school back in the early '50s?" he asked.

"Sure do."

"Do you remember how you just couldn't wait for recess and as soon as the bell rang you were out the door?"

"I remember very well that we headed to the playground and the teachers headed to the lounge, most likely to smoke about three cigarettes and have a couple cups of coffee!"

"Well, we had this kid in my class, he was bigger than the rest of us. I'm sure it was because he'd flunked about two or three grades. We were in fifth grade, and he was the class bully. I was short and with my red hair, freckles and glasses was the butt of many jokes and pranks. This guy's name was Arlie Lundberg and he was meaner than snot. For some unknown reason Arlie felt his life's purpose was to make my life as miserable as possible. He did a great job of it too!"

"After months of harassment I felt like flunking a grade just so I wouldn't have to be with him in sixth grade! I don't think I'd be here today if he hadn't got sent to reform school for stealing beer. Do you remember Jim's Buyrite grocery store down on Second Street?

Yes, they rented meat lockers in the big freezer room in the back, that's where Linda and I kept our frozen goods until we could afford our own freezer", I recounted.

"Well, that was the store."

"So, if you could go back what would you do differently?"

"My first thought would be to do something to get even, settle a nearly sixty year old score," he said, "but if we could really time travel then I'd slip some birth control pills in my pocket, go back to before he was born and put them in his mom's aspirin bottle. Since birth control pills weren't invented until the late 1950s, she'd never know what she was taking. That way I could have prevented a bad accident from ever happening!"

We both laughed hysterically at the thought. John choked on his lemonade and spewed all over the carpet. Pat came to see what was so funny. John said he'd tell her later and asked if dinner was ready. It was and we soon sat down at the kitchen table for a great summer meal of fried chicken, with real mashed potatoes with homemade gravy, corn on the cob, and hot apple pie. As we were eating, I couldn't help feel a deep longing for my Linda. It was at this same table where we shared so many meals, board games, talk of kids and grandkids, and above all a kinship that is only common among dear old friends.

When we were through, I helped Pat with the dishes, hollered good-bye to John who was back in his chair in front of the tube, and headed home.