

MY SPECIAL GIFT TO AL HUDSON ON HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY

By Laura Whyte

Al Hudson has been a dear friend of mine for over 12 years. He has been like a father to me as well as a mentor in woodworking and life in general. So for his 100th birthday, I really had to come up with something special.

I asked Al if he'd like to go visit his old childhood home in Chattanooga and he was really excited. I figured we'll just do a drive by and see what it looks like today compared to when it was built back in 1925. Al's father and grandfather built that house and Al helped worked on the garage when he was older. (From what I understood, a lot of fine woodwork was in that house).

So, I did what I could to contact the owner a week prior with hopes to see if I could get permission from the owner to go inside the house. It was a longshot but I thought how amazing it would be for Al to see his father and grandfather's woodwork one more time but unfortunately no one answered. Today, that home is a day care center that a "stay at home" mom runs and cares for 5 - 7 children. I believe that could be why she didn't answer. I'm not sure. I was hoping to tell her about Al and his bucket list of seeing the inside of the house and perhaps telling her of its history. I understood her not answering and even if she did answer I wouldn't blame her denying us entry.

Regardless, my husband and I, and Al headed to Chattanooga. Well, this trip could not have turned out any better.

As we arrived into the town of Chattanooga Al pointed out where he got married and even where he got into mischief as a child. It was wonderful to hear his memories.

When we arrived at the house I happened to see the owner in the backyard peering suspiciously over the fence. I thought wow this was my chance! So, as Al and my husband waited in the car I went up to her and told her that Al was turning 100 and his dad and grand-dad built that house.

I asked if it was okay just to have his photo taken on her steps. That's all I asked. She hesitated and said okay. Helping Al we sat on the steps and after a few minutes she said..."would you like to see the backyard?" I was so happy and Al too.



I knew it! In minutes, we were in the house! His charm won the homeowner over. Al was amazed and took comfort that most of his dad's woodwork was preserved as he remembered it. Looking at the woodwork you could see where Al got his acquired his mastercraft. He definitely followed his father and grandfather's footsteps and style.

I was awestruck as I listened to Al tell her all about the history of the house as she listened to every word and asked a lot of questions. I found it amazing how Paulette went quickly from being a stranger to being an old friend. Al went from room to room pointing out the fancy woodwork from the kitchen cabinets with ribbon carving, to the wood floor, the fine wood molding, the fireplace mantle in the living room, the beautiful dresser and mirror that I believe was built into the wall and so on... There was so much more woodwork that I can't think of at the moment - I was so taken as we walked from room to room.

It's so easy to see where Al gets his influence and fine woodworking skills. Everywhere you looked there was fine detail. Even outside there was a beautiful cross design in brick.



Paulette was a sweetheart during this entire visit. She was so accommodating and has been in touch with me almost daily asking and commenting about Al's birthday photos on Facebook and commented about how touched she was that Al he came into her life.

I could not ask for a better ending to this story. I am so glad I her that day standing in the backyard and how she took a chance by welcoming us into her home. Although it was Al's birthday gift I believe I received a gift as well.

Heading home we celebrated with margaritas at lunch by the water. What a perfect way to end the day!

