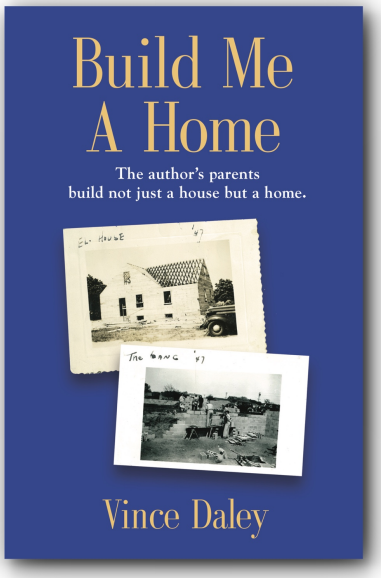

The effort of the author's parents to build by hand and retain, not just a house, but, a home for their six young children in the difficult and tumultuous years following World War II.

Build Me a Home

The author's parents
build not just a house but a home.

By Vince Daley

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-142-7

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

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Chapter One

Fredericks Avenue

My earliest memories are of an older house on Fredericks Avenue in a village called Bellmore. The village was one of those small bedroom communities that seemed to have sprung up next to the right of way of the Long Island Railroad as it ran east from New York City along the one hundred mile plus sandbar that was known as Long Island. The town had tree-lined streets with small, cozy, comfortable-looking homes and, despite being described as being "in the country" by the prevailing standards of the day, everything still seemed to be within walking distance. We knew the neighbors up and down the street and all the children, as well. Oftentimes, my mother would walk us into the center of town, such as it was in those days, my sister Elizabeth in a baby carriage, and my brother James and I each walking on either side, within easy grabbing range of my mother's quick hands.

With the exception of the A&P, most of the stores along Bedford Avenue, which was the main street at that time, were small specialty shops. By way of contrast, Marzigliano's was an old wooden framed building that stood on the corner of Grand Avenue and Bellmore Avenue. It was somewhat unique as a town institution in that it was a combination of grocery store, hardware store, and a nursery supply center. It seemed that you could buy almost anything there and it had been around as long as anyone could remember.

Across from the train station, which was barely a stone's throw from Sunrise Highway, were a string of small stores, including a drugstore, a florist, an ice cream parlor, a travel agent and a small movie theatre formally known as the Bellmore Theatre but informally referred to as "The Itch", presumably because it was so old that everyone believed it had fleas. "The Itch" would remain the sole source of movies in Bellmore until The Playhouse Theatre opened on Bedford Avenue, years later. We spent more than our share of Saturday afternoons watching cowboy movies at "The Itch." My father or mother would pile half a dozen kids from the neighborhood in the car and drop us all at the theatre.

The house on Fredericks Avenue always seemed small and dark and I'm told that we moved there in 1944 when I was almost two years of age. Those were the latter years of World War II and everything was still scarce due to rationing. My mother would have bitter arguments with the local merchants about getting access to food and coal. She would contend that they all were involved in the "black market" and when she would buy coal, half of it was rocks and slate that would not burn. She was very much like her own mother in her willingness to call them all "a bunch of thieves" to their faces, when it seemed warranted.

It was much later in life that I would learn of a major argument between my mother and my paternal grandmother that had precipitated our move to Bellmore, prompting my parents to leave their roots in Brooklyn behind for a rented house twenty-five miles to the east on Long Island's South Shore. It also sounded as if my father had been a reluctant participant in the process. The controversy apparently developed because my father and his mother had picked out a house for our family close to his parents' house in Brooklyn and placed a deposit on it

without my mother ever having seen it. My sense of the situation, so many years later, is that my father always felt invulnerable to attack when he was with or acted in concert with his mother. This probably came from having lived in the same house with her until he was thirty-two years of age. But, this time, he had made a serious miscalculation.

When he had married my mother four years earlier, she had been twenty-two, a full ten years younger than he was. Upon being told of the deposit having been placed on the house, my mother's young and volatile temper, having stayed under wraps for several years in the interest of family peace and harmony, finally erupted and we were all out the door in record time for a relatively brief sojourn at my maternal grandmother's apartment, followed quickly by the move to Long Island. As a result of this confrontation, my mother Elizabeth Reilly Daley and my paternal grandmother Mary Ryan Daley, developed and maintained a grudging respect, if not affection for one another, that would last for many years.

When I said that all of us were out the door, there was one exception, my father. He would catch up with us later after battling barriers at both ends of the family, his and my mother's. At the end of the day, however, once the smoke had cleared, our family ended up on Frederick's Avenue in Bellmore. Henceforth, Brooklyn would remain a not too distant memory.

Interestingly enough, my mother seemed most proud of the fact that she had "taken on" the relatively tyrannical matriarch of the Daley clan while my grandmother was still in her prime. Others in the Daley family would only find the courage to oppose her when she had become old and feeble, or so my mother said. After that confrontation and resultant move, we would only see

the Daley's periodically when Dad made the long drive to Coleman Street in Brooklyn or they chose to visit us "in the country."

The house on Frederick's Avenue was old and rundown, but in truth, as a child, it never registered on me in exactly that way. I recall a living room with a large heating grate in the floor near the doorway to the kitchen. That grate heated the whole house with hot air from a coal-fired furnace and, at times, became incredibly hot. I can recall falling and burning my hand on it when I was very young. My mother and father would take turns stoking the furnace. My father would shovel coal in the morning before walking to the station to catch the train to the city. My mother had the job during the day. I can still remember her throwing the shovel, which was perched at the head of the basement steps, down those stairs, before descending, in order to scare off the rats that occasionally inhabited the basement. A small stream ran through the yard behind the house that appeared to be the source of the rats. When it rained heavily we almost always accumulated five or six inches of water in the basement, as well. There were those times when my mother would stand in her bare feet in cold water in the basement stoking the furnace.

My older brother James and I slept in a room off the living room that probably had once served as a dining room. There was no real door. It was just a large alcove with a curtain that was pulled shut in order to close off the room at night. I really don't remember my parent's bedroom but there were finished wooden floors throughout the house, with the exception of the kitchen which had a linoleum floor. A threadbare carpet covered the living room floor. The kitchen was large and we took all our meals there. The kitchen window looked out on a fairly spacious

backyard, bordered by the stream that consistently produced the rats in the basement.

At some time in those early years the Reilly family moved into the house next door. It took me many years to figure out that Mom Reilly was not only my mother's mother but also my maternal grandmother. Anna Reilly would permit no one to call her Grandma. As you might expect, this made identifying her true position in the family hierarchy that much harder. Once, in response to my earnest question, "Who is Mom Reilly to me?", my uncle, Danny Malone declared, "Don't you know who she is? That's your Grandmother." Mom Reilly quickly rebuked Danny, "I am not his grandmother. Don't be telling him that Danny Malone. I'd like to give you such a smack."

To this day, I wonder at her aversion to the term grandmother. In later years, when I began to take note of what I perceived to be significant differences in personalities between my siblings and myself, I often wondered if I were illegitimate or adopted. Perhaps, that was the cause of Mom Reilly's reluctance towards being referred to as my grandmother. But, it wasn't just me. She was consistently adamant about the subject with all her grandchildren down through the years. To all of us she was "Mom" and, even today, I can think of her in no other terms.

The Reilly's became a lynchpin of our family for the next fifteen or twenty years before the relationship began to unravel. There was, of course, Mom Reilly, herself. Her seven children, in descending order of age were: Agnes, Anna, Arthur, Elizabeth, Frances, William, and the baby, Charles. Her husband William had been twenty years her senior when they married. He had been thirty-nine and she a teenager of nineteen. He had come from a relatively affluent background while hers had been far

more modest. Not surprisingly, his family did not approve of the marriage because of both the age difference and the difference in social levels. They quickly cut him off from both family contact and family finances. The story goes that one of my grandfather's brothers had appeared at the Reilly apartment shortly before he had died at age fifty-nine close to Christmas in 1928. He arrived with a bag of oranges in hand, pointedly noting that the fruit was for his brother "not all these brats." To my knowledge, my Uncle Charles was sixteen months old at the time of his father's death. For years afterward, Mom Reilly would bemoan her fate by saying, "How could Will Reilly die and leave me with all these children?"

My mother was ten when her father died and his death close to Christmas was so traumatic an event to her that she seemed to have difficulty celebrating the holiday for years to come.

For me, it was almost as if the Reilly's had sprung up as a family on Fredericks Avenue overnight. One day they were not there and then, suddenly the next day, they had appeared. With the exception of Agnes, a somewhat dour person, and Anna, who seemed caught in a difficult marriage, they were always laughing and joking. Arthur had been away during World War II and he was to reappear a year or so later. Shortly before Arthur's return, Charles disappeared wearing an army uniform. I remember running up the street after him and calling out, "Where are you going?"

He just smiled and waved and said, "Go home. Don't get lost now." Then he was gone.

Later, we would learn that Arthur had been a member of first the 82nd and then the 101st Airborne Divisions. He was one of the

famous "Bastards of Bastogne". He had also jumped into Arnhem as part of the disastrous "Market Garden Operation" intended to end the war by Christmas of 1944. William, it was said jokingly, "had fought the battle of Staten Island" because of his stateside posting in the Navy. Charles had spent most of 1945 sitting in the office of the draft board trying to enlist at the age of seventeen. When he turned eighteen, he immediately enlisted and then told the family that he had been drafted. It was left to my mother to challenge the draft board on this point, only to find out that he had in fact enlisted. Mom Reilly, of course, was never told the truth and she continued to take great pride in the fact that all her sons had been drafted. None had been foolish enough to enlist, or so she was led to believe.

Mom had lost her younger brother Christie at a very young age as a result of his having been gassed during World War I. Because of that experience, she had no use for wars or politicians. Christie had returned home in poor health, ultimately, dying three years later. Within a few weeks of Charles' enlistment, the war in the Pacific ended and, following the Japanese surrender, he became part of the occupation forces. What I remember most about all of them was how quickly they had appeared as a family and their seemingly constant good humor with only Mom Reilly's stern manner to temper their antics.

My father had his own share of special moments during World War II, as well. As a child, he had contracted infantile paralysis, better known today as polio. The disease left him with a permanent limp. He was exceedingly proud when initially called by the draft board at the age of thirty-three only to eventually learn that he was being classified as "4F". Years later he would complain bitterly that he was one of the few younger men left in

town during the war years and he felt that he was looked on by women whose husbands were away as some sort of "fifth columnist". Later in the war, there was an opportunity for him to be employed by the government as a civilian in North Africa at a salary dramatically higher than the wages he earned as a city employee, but, my mother would have none of it. She was convinced that he was simply looking at a way to escape from his wife and children for a few years.

In the meantime, our family continued to grow. My sister Elizabeth and my brother Paul seemed to spring up out of nowhere as well. Elizabeth was born in 1945, almost without notice, certainly without significant notice on my part. Two years later, in 1947, Paul appeared. When my brother Paul was born, I had already grown quite attached to my mother and she seemed to be gone for a very long time. I would hover by my father's side, constantly asking him, "Dad, where's Mommy? When is she coming home?" He would burn trash in an open wire container in the backyard and tell me how Mommy would be home soon with a new baby. I can't say that I recall ever asking where all these new babies were coming from.

Fredericks Avenue was a place of many warm memories for me. My Aunt Frances was still single at the time, not yet having married Danny Malone. She would return from work in the evening and take a shortcut from Grand Avenue, walking across the creek at the end of Fredericks Avenue. She would step on the large stones lying in the bed of the stream while wearing her high-heeled shoes. Her brothers would watch her from the house, laughing and teasing saying, "Watch it now. Don't fall. Uh, oh, she's going to get wet." Frances would lean back and forth and hop from rock to rock laughing and finally yelling, "Oh, shut up." Mom Reilly would lean out a window or stand on

the porch chastising her sons with a stern face. She would sound off as only she could, "Charles, William, leave her alone. And you Frances, what are you doing? Be careful."

There was also the time that Charles, as a teenager, roared down the street, riding an old Indian motorcycle that he had borrowed from a friend. It was summer and he wore no shirt while his straight black hair blew in the wind. Mom Reilly, hearing the commotion, screamed from the front door, "Charles Reilly! Charles Hartford Reilly! You get off that thing. Do you want to kill yourself?"

And there was Charles, laughing and waving as he roared back up the block and my mother smothering her laughter with her hand as Mom Reilly fumed next door. The Reilly's all seemed to be matinee idol handsome and full of laughter. We had inherited some of the good looks and some of the temperament, as well, but it seemed to be somewhat tempered by the darker coloring and more practical nature of the Daley's. The Daley's, in contrast, were not what anyone would describe as happy go lucky people.

When my mother and my Aunt Frances were both learning to drive, they would practice in front of both houses using either my father's car or Arthur's car. Inevitably they would back into one car or the other while trying to park or turn around. Their brothers would hoot and holler from the front door of the house, laughing all the while. Arthur would cry out in mock anguish, "My car, my car!"

My mother and Frances would laugh and shout back, "Oh shut up!"

Mom Reilly would intervene from the door with, “Leave them alone. Frances, be careful. Elizabeth, be careful, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph”.

Next to our house on Fredericks Avenue, stood a dilapidated shed, that was just about falling down. But, to my father, that was the garage for his car, a 1936 Pontiac that he had bought new when he was single. By this point in time, however, the car had clearly seen better days. One day while backing the car out of the “garage”, my mother hit one of the support beams and the “garage” came down in a pile on the car. My mother looked at the wreckage only a bit perturbed and then walked inside leaving the car jutting halfway out of what had been a structure of sorts a few minutes earlier but now only a pile of old wood lying on the car. When my father walked home from the railroad station that evening the first thing he saw was a pile of debris sitting on his car where once a “garage” had stood. He quickly mourned the passing of his garage, “Jesus Christ, Bee! What the hell happened to the garage? Look at my car! Look at this mess! What the hell am I going to tell the landlord?” On and on he went for a full fifteen minutes until my mother, patient to a fault at times in spite of her temper, finally had heard enough and shouted back, “Oh shut up! Just shut up! I’ll pay to fix it.”

Next door, despite all the hoopla, there was not a Reilly head in sight, although, I’m certain that they were taking it all in behind drawn curtains, shaking with mirth and tears of laughter streaming down their faces. Finally, realizing that he was beaten, my father gave up and began to remove the remains of the “garage” from his car.

Despite the relative tranquility of the town and our life there during those early years, there were some “dark moments” as

well. I remember my brother James running to my mother with a broken rusty scissors stuck clear through his cheek. He had apparently found the scissors and, then, while playing with it, had managed to fall on it. My mother, not one to panic and ever cool to all forms of disasters, refused to remove it from his cheek, bundled him up, took him to the doctor's office just a block away, where the offending instrument was removed, several stitches taken and a tetanus shot given. There was also the time when Jackie Butt, an older neighborhood boy, was swinging a golf club and managed to whack the side of James' head. That one was fairly serious. Although there was no fracture, there was lots of blood, clips required to close the wound, and a concussion. James also managed to get himself knocked down by a car while running across Bedford Avenue in the center of town. James just seemed to be a natural born disaster and every time we turned around, he was getting hurt.

The "dark moment" that I remember most clearly, however, was a bit different. It involved my father, my brother James and me. I was always one for climbing trees and I suppose that my father had told me to stay out of the trees, although, I'm not really sure why he would have done that. After all, most kids make it a point to climb trees. It's almost as if it's expected of a kid. One evening I must have miscalculated the time and I was still climbing in one of the small trees in front of the house when he returned from work and he promptly began to yell, "Vincent, get out of that God damned tree."

I quickly scurried down but when he told me to, "Get over here", I lost all courage and took off up the block. My father, now in a panic at having frightened me into running towards the busier Streets, at the end of Fredericks Avenue, told my brother James to catch me while he followed in the car. In the process, I

managed to avoid my brother and my father for a good thirty minutes or so, losing one of my shoes in the middle of a busy street. The shoe was promptly run over and ruined which was no small matter in those days. Shoes were in short supply and cost money, which was also in short supply. Eventually, realizing that there was no place to go or to hide, I returned home to the one and only beating I ever recall receiving from my father. I suppose that he was more frightened at the prospect of my getting hit by a car than he was angry at me for climbing trees, running away, and losing my shoe. Even today, I am still puzzled at why he was so upset about my climbing that tree? Why the great anger? I'm sure that it was something else on his mind. Perhaps, the worries and frustrations of the day had become too much for him.

From that day forward I was also a little suspicious and distrustful of my brother James. He just seemed too willing to chase me down. I guess I thought that he should have chosen my side more often and tried to help me more when we were kids. Even when we were children growing up, I can remember jumping in to help him many times when a bigger kid was beating him up. On the other hand, I can recall him standing by and watching when a bigger kid was beating on me. Perhaps, it was a small thing. Perhaps I was a bit paranoid. Still, it was something I always remembered and carried through life with me. What is it that they say, "Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean that the world isn't out to get me".

Fredericks Avenue was a place that, for the most part, made me feel warm and safe. When my mother would clean, I would follow her around the house and ask her questions. She in turn would try to answer them as best she could. My father was a man who dressed in a suit and tie, wore a fedora hat and an

overcoat in winter, and left for work early each morning and returned in the evening. When my mother was ill or in the hospital having a baby and he was home with us, I remember him as a man wearing a brown leather bomber jacket but still the same fedora hat. He was also not very handy at repairing things. Once he became so frustrated at trying to fix my tricycle that he picked it up and flung it towards the back door breaking several of the glass panes in the door. They remained broken for some period of time as well. I recall the early Christmases when we would go to bed with no tree and no decorations to wake in the morning to a brightly-lit tree surrounded by beautifully wrapped presents. There was also a dog named 'Brownie". She had given birth to a litter of pups one year. On one memorable occasion, Mom Reilly knocked on the front door of our house, calling out as she entered, "Elizabeth?" At that very moment, half a dozen children and Brownie and her pups were rapidly exiting the house by the very same door. She exclaimed, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! What is this, Dagwood Bumstead's house? There's nothing but kids and dogs?"

Uncle Joe Daley was my father's older brother. His wife, my Aunt Frances, was nicknamed, "Whitey", apparently, because she had platinum blonde hair. They were a well-dressed somber couple who would come to visit us on weekends, stay for a while, and then insist that they had to get back to Brooklyn. I never remember seeing my paternal grandmother, Mary Daley, at that house. They tell me that my paternal grandfather, James Daley, was still alive then but he also is not in my memories of Fredericks Avenue. I do have flickering visions of a kindly white-haired man in a bathrobe who would sit in a wicker chair on the enclosed front porch of the house on Coleman Street. My mother recounted a story about how, when I was very young, I took off like a shot around a corner in the house, almost running

him down, at which time he let loose with an uncharacteristic, "Jesus Christ!" He was never a man to say much but my mother said that she always liked him and that he had a kind heart. According to my father, he died in 1945 when I was about three years of age. My father was with him, holding his hand, when his kindly heart finally burst.

These are my memories of the first "home" that I can recall.

Chapter Two

The Promise of a New Home

My Uncle Arthur used to have a "darkly humorous" saying about his own personal experience as a combat soldier during World War II, "They can't make you fight. They just take you where the fighting is." In many respects life is not much different. Life can't make you do any one specific thing at a given time but it tends to put you in a position where you have to do something. And so it was to be with our family as well.

By early 1947, we had been living in the house on Fredericks Avenue for just about three years. My sister Elizabeth was almost two years of age and James had started first grade at Saint Barnabas parochial school. I would be starting kindergarten at the public school in town in the fall. Although we children were not aware of it at the time, my mother was expecting a fourth child in late summer, my brother Paul.

My father was a man who was not inclined to make risky moves whether in his home life or at his job. The move to Long Island from Brooklyn had been a minor miracle, accomplished only because of the bad blood between my mother and my maternal grandmother and the imminent threat to my father of losing his wife and children. He was now almost thirty-nine years of age and he had worked for the Board of Education of New York City for almost twenty of those thirty-nine years. He had also become accustomed to life in the small rented house on Fredericks Avenue. My mother, on the other hand, was more adventurous, much more of a risk-taker. She would have been willing to move

in a minute, particularly for something better. Curiously, though, in later life, she would always caution her children against new opportunities, changing jobs or houses or whatever. Whether that latent caution was caused by the natural progression of age or events is hard to say. In any event the house on Fredericks Avenue had become too small for our family now and it was in a poor state of repair. Hardly a day went by when there wasn't a problem of one sort or another. It was also the period immediately following World War II when all the troops were coming home, looking for jobs and houses for families engendered by the rash of marriages and new births during the war years.

In spite of her spirit of adventure, my mother probably would have stayed on Fredericks Avenue had not fate, in the form of a letter from the landlord, taken the matter out of my parents' hands. The letter advised that the landlord planned to sell the house and that we would have to vacate the premises within ninety days. Moving a family with three children and one on the way to a new home within ninety days would have been difficult enough under ordinary circumstances, but, in the postwar years it was virtually impossible. The demand for housing was extremely high and the supply extremely low. They needed a plan and my father and my Uncle Danny Malone, spent many an evening contemplating our plight over a six-pack of beer.

Danny and Frances were now married and lived in a small apartment on St. Marks Avenue, relatively close to St. Barnabas Church. Their apartment was too small for a family so they faced a similar problem in terms of finding adequate housing for the future. Of course, at this point, no one realized that my mother already had a plan. Her plan was very simple. My father and Danny would build two houses, one for our family and the

other for the Malone family. Danny Malone had grown up in upstate New York, near Kingston and my father's favorite line about Danny was, "You can take Danny out of the country but you can't take the country out of Danny." Malone had migrated south in the first year of the war to work in a defense plant in Brooklyn. Shortly thereafter he enlisted in the Navy. It was in Brooklyn that he met and courted my mother's younger sister, Frances Reilly. Soon, after the war ended they were married and had taken up residence in the small apartment on the second floor of the private house on St. Marks Avenue.

My mother used to say that Danny was tall and lean with dark curly hair and that he was the spitting image of the actor Joseph Cotton. Malone had the same dark-haired blue-eyed Irish good looks of my mother's family. More importantly, Danny could do almost anything with his hands. He could do mechanical work on cars and carpentry, masonry, and plumbing work on houses. In many ways, he was the key to my mother's plan.

On their many evenings of "planning", my father and Danny would guzzle their cans of Rheingold beer and Malone would proclaim loudly how easy it was to build a house. And then one evening my mother, weary of listening to all the talk and, not unconcerned about the prospect of having to move, finally called their bluff and sprang her trap, "It's not that hard to build a house? Then do it. Stop talking and do it."

Knowing the tenacity of her will, my father's face must have dropped like a stone. Malone, however, was not willing to surrender so easily, "Why? You don't think that we can do it? What's the big deal? You dig a hole, build a foundation, frame it out, and then you finish it. The two of us could do it easy." My father, of course, recognizing that they were now on treacherous

ground was back peddling quickly, "You can't just start building. You need money, land. Where are you going to get those from?" Money was very tight in those days but my mother had managed to put aside about $700.00 or roughly 10% of the cost of a house at the time and she was pressing hard now, "We can buy the land, use the land as collateral for a construction loan, and we start building." Malone and my father must have been speechless for the moment but suddenly they realized that this was in fact possible. They really could build not one house but two houses, one for the Daley's and one for the Malone's. And so it was that simple a beginning for a great adventure that would last two years and take many hours of labor by the direct participants and relatives as well.

The first problem to be resolved was getting a stay from the court relative to our impending eviction from the house on Fredericks Avenue. Obviously feeling some sympathy for a family of five with a fourth child due in a matter of months, a one-year stay was granted by the courts. With the stay in hand, my parents, Danny and Frances began scouring the newspapers, eventually settling on two lots on Lincoln Street in North Bellmore, about two miles north of where we now lived. The street had perhaps a half dozen older homes now in place and a large tract of land that had previously been potato fields. Danny and Frances purchased one lot that was 75 feet by 125 feet and my folks an adjacent lot of the same size. Eddie Murphy, a friend of my father's from work, purchased a third lot that bordered our property on the east. The lots were purchased for $400.00 each. In light of the fact that we were the closest to being evicted with three children and one on the way, the strategy was to build our house first, followed immediately by a house for Danny and Frances. A construction loan was obtained

from the local bank by pledging the property and that which had been unthinkable only weeks before was now underway.

It was early in 1947 and, although the war had been over for almost two years, there were still significant shortages of materials. It became a struggle to acquire everything that was needed in a timely fashion and at the agreed upon price. Postwar inflation was driving prices ever higher. When a plumbing contractor cried to my father and my uncle about the rising prices and wanted to install a smaller fresh water tank for the same price, my father sympathized but my mother was adamant, "If prices had gone down would he have given us back money? "The hell with him".

Unfortunately, my father allowed the plumber to install the smaller tank to his everlasting regret. For years to come he experienced nothing but grief from burned out overworked water pumps caused by the smaller tank, not to mention, my mother's constant reminders of a bad decision. Working in their favor, however, was the fact that those returning from the war were young and strong. This group included the Reilly brothers and Danny Malone. My father, however, was thirty-nine years old, an office worker for all of his career, and a man who had never lifted a hammer in his life, before now. The Daley family, of course, thought it all absolute lunacy and offered nothing in the way of either financial or manual assistance and, less still, in the way of moral encouragement. They did, however, show up periodically on the weekends to monitor my father and mother's folly and to eat a hot meal or two. My father and Danny would eat dinner at our house and start work on the new house in the early evening after working a full day at their jobs. Those evenings were always a bit of a scramble. On one occasion, as she was preparing to serve dinner, my mother dropped a bowl of

mashed potatoes on the kitchen floor. Her sister Frances looked aghast at the mess on the floor but, fortunately, my father and Danny had not seen the accident. Without hesitation, my mother scooped up the potatoes from the floor and proceeded to serve them. These were difficult times and one could not afford to be too finicky.

Danny and my father would then work until midnight every night and all day on the weekends. Weather was no deterrent to their efforts because they were clearly fighting the clock even more determinedly than the weather. The courts had granted my parents only a year to vacate the house on Fredericks Avenue and it appeared that further reprieves were unlikely. Although the first step of excavating for a foundation was contracted out, any manual work that could be done to reduce the cost was undertaken.

Now began the painstaking work of building the foundation block by block. Pouring a foundation into forms was more expensive and also thought to produce a less reliable product. Primarily because of the cost consideration that option quickly fell by the wayside. They poured footings and began building walls out of block.

For fifty years of his life my father was to smoke a pipe and now was no different. He seemed to constantly be losing his pipes in the foundation. Malone would proclaim loudly, “Jesus Christ, Daley, you must have fifty pipes cemented into this foundation.” The stories of his losing one more pipe to the foundation were myriad. On one occasion he was reputed to have dropped a cement block on his foot, opened his mouth to cuss a blue streak, and lost another pipe to the foundation. Malone even swore that

my father had cemented his shirttail into the foundation several times but still they pressed on.

On the weekends friends and family would appear to help with the cement work. Finally, on one momentous weekend, the Reilly brothers and other family members and friends helped to position the huge steel I beams that would support the house. Certainly at that point my parents and the Malone's, as well as other family members, must have been amazed at what they had achieved and knew without a doubt that this thing would really happen. A home was truly being built. I look back now at the photos of the young, strong, laughing faces filled with enthusiasm and the pride of having done something so significant and marvel at their courage and the achievement. The framing out of the walls was followed quickly by the beginnings of a roof. Only Arthur Reilly and Danny Malone were willing to walk the ridge pole of the roof without a handhold. My father was reputed to have said more than once, "The hell with that, one hand is for the job and one hand for me."

In July of that year, my brother Paul was born and they celebrated his Christening after closing in the roof. The Christening was an outdoor affair in late August at the site of the new house, still under construction. It included the ever-present keg of beer and many home-cooked dishes. Those that had to relieve themselves of the beer that they had swished down had to climb down a ladder to the yet unfinished basement where a canvas partition had been set up for the sake of modesty. Even the Daley's from Brooklyn attended the Christening and actually made use of the "convenience" that had been established behind the canvas partition. All that is except "Aunt Whitey" who steadfastly insisted that she would not be able to climb down the ladder, much less pee when she got there. Eventually, an

exception was made and with the assistance of other ladies, she retreated behind some trees for relief. They drank the beer and sang happy songs, danced, and thanked God for a new child and, at last, their own roof over their heads. Through the rains of spring, the heat of summer, and the cold snows of winter, my father and Danny Malone had labored. Along the way, cars had broken down and they were forced to cease their work on the house to repair them or to push them through the mud and snow for a start. And at the end of that fateful year of 1947, they had fulfilled half their promise. A new house stood nearly complete on Lincoln Street.

In February of 1948, my parents began to load their personal possessions and furniture into and onto the 1936 Pontiac, moving everything to the new house. They made trip after trip with the old Pontiac until the house on Fredericks Avenue stood virtually empty. Finally, on a cold evening in February, we made the final trip to the new house built by my father, Danny and friends and relatives. As we entered the house, it seemed immense to all of us. The rooms looked so much larger than Fredericks Avenue and the new oak floors had been varnished and polished to a bright sheen. New vinyl tiles covered the kitchen floor. No doors had yet been hung and for weeks thereafter blankets covered bathroom and bedroom doors, allowing for a few surprises from time to time.

Almost immediately after our move into the new house, work began on the Malone house. Both the tasks to be performed and the players to perform them were about the same. Fortunately, they had learned along the way and work went a little easier and the mistakes were fewer. Danny also made some improvements on his house as compared to ours by including a dormer and the necessary plumbing for another bathroom on the second floor of

the house. Towards the end, Danny did more and more of the work himself. He was never one to wait on anyone and my father, now forty, seemed to be tiring from the effort. By the end of 1948, the second house was complete and the Malone's moved in. Danny and Frances would remain our next door neighbors for the next twelve years. As I looked back on it now, more than seventy years later, I am still amazed at the miracle that my parents and the Malone's had wrought in two short years. We finally had a home, our home. It was something that I'm sure no one believed possible, except, perhaps, for my mother. I think she always knew that it was not only possible, but, that it eventually would be so. Of course, my mother also noted that, "Once the two houses were complete, your father threw down his hammer and never picked it up again."

A few of my mother's dreams for the new house had also died along the way. When she had suggested that it be a brick house, Danny Malone and my father were apoplectic as they shouted about the potential cost. A raised patio that could be reached from the dining room via French doors had also fallen victim to cost considerations. For so many years that followed, my mother would bemoan the loss of the brick house and the patio.

On one occasion, Danny Malone's mother visited my parents and after a cursory examination of the kitchen, pantry, basement steps, and the side entrance, she was quick to note, "It's clear that a man designed this house." The kitchen window faced west rather than east, one had to pass thru a door and then open a second door to reach the pantry, and the entrance area for the side door was also the landing for the staircase to the basement.

From my own perspective, looking back on it all now, it would be more than fair to say that my father and Danny Malone had

performed “well above and beyond the call” during that amazing two-year period.


DALEY's & MURPHYS '47

The GANG '47

Dan - Vin - CHARLES - EDDIE '47


VIN- ARTHUR
'47


'47


DAN - JAMES '47


DAN - VINCENT '47


Joe - Arthur - Andy - Charles
'47


El. House
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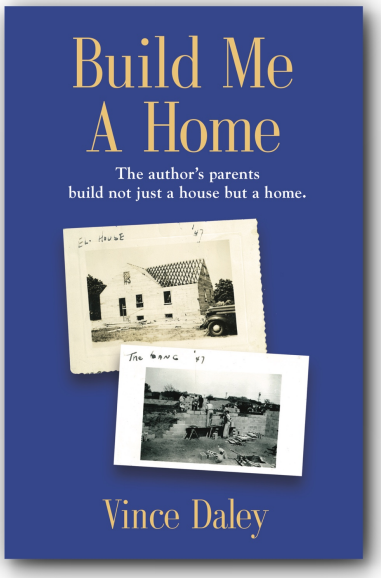
Other Books by Vince Daley

- “D.O.R. A Memoir” – Published By Book Locker in July of 2013

- “Elizabeth’s Wish” - Published By Book Locker in April of 2017



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