

NAÏVE ROOMING HOUSE MANAGERS

Marilyn and I married December 23, 1961, in my Third Year of Civil Engineering. Some could philosophise that was not an “opportune” time in a university student’s life nor an example of good planning, but young people are under the impression that two people can live as economically as one. With the assistance of our mutual families, we decided to “test” that theory.

Marilyn’s Aunty operated a Rooming House in Saskatoon. It was a two (2) storey building over a full basement. She came to us with an idea that would assist us financially.

Aunty had a personal suite that consisted of a Living Room, Kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and a private Entry Porch at the rear of the suite. The street side had a common entrance door (that was never locked) and porch that was used to access a Foyer for all the Tenants as well as the personal suite.

The original Sitting Room / Den at the front and adjacent to the suite was renovated to accommodate a single woman. I never entered this part of the house, so I assume that it likely had a small kitchen, bathroom and a large room that was used as a Living Room / Bedroom. A common bathroom accommodated the Suite and this rental Suite.

A staircase from the front door entrance Foyer provided access for the second floor Tenants. This consisted of three (3) separate Tenant Suites which were serviced by a common bathroom.

There was a mother-in-law separate Suite adjacent to the Alley that was also a rental Suite.

I will use pseudo names for everyone in this story.

We spent our wedding night in the upstairs Suite overlooking the street. It was an interesting experience but I was distracted with my studies and so we managed through to the end of April that year.

Aunty came up with an idea for our last year of university. “Why don’t Marilyn and you take over my Suite and I will go on a holiday. When I come back, I will live in the rear Suite. You two can look after the Rooming House and I will discount the rental (total \$35 / month). There will be nothing to do as I will collect the rent and look after all the operating expenses,” she offered. To us it sounded like a great deal, and we left for a summer job in the Kootenays satisfied that we had preplanned our final year accommodations.

We arrive in early September and move into a furnished Suite which was great as we were now a family of three (3) with our daughter Nona.

Now story unfolds in a manner that we least expected by, on reflection, it was an epic in the true sense that would render some movies secondary.

Mable lived on the main floor Suite, and we noticed that a Saskatoon Police car would be parked late at night by the sidewalk. Soon we realized that Mable was keeping company. We felt very safe as he would come and go quietly, and we did not ask Mable any questions as it was not any of our business.

Aunty would come and go from her new residence at the back and we soon realized that she really was not interested in travelling anywhere because she was a very conservative and thrifty lady who now had her Rooming House totally rented out.

Sophie who lived alone on the second floor was a nice young lady. She would visit with Marilyn at time and was good company. One afternoon a very irate lady knocked on our door and wanted to know where Sophie lived. A short while later, there was hollering and screaming as this lady proceeded to call Sophie all kinds of names (that I cannot write here) and repeated very clearly for all of Saskatoon to hear "stay away from my husband, you B-tch." This routine was repeated a few times during that year.

The two young men that lived in our original Suite across the Hall from Sophie, were an interesting duo. One was a Philosophy student that only had 21 hours of formal studies per week. He seemed to be conducting laboratory work in Beer Parlours. He told us that was the best place to study the character of people. His Roommate had a job somewhere or at least he was gone all day. We did not have anything much to say about them as they lived quietly while in the Rooming House.

A young couple lived in the third upstairs Suite, and we did not have much to do with them but let us call them John and Susan. Late one evening we heard a loud knocking on the rear door while a blizzard was in progress. When I opened the door, I found a couple with two (2) children looking up at me from the entrance stairs. "Do John and Susan live here?" they asked. The temperature was very much at below freezing and I could tell that they needed shelter. "We are their relatives from North Battleford and came to visit them". So, we paraded through our Suite, and I led them upstairs to John and Susan's Suite. It was obvious that they spent at least the night there if not longer. I wonder how all of them managed in that small Suite.

We had two (2) bachelors in the basement full Suite which had a rear entrance. Pierre and Jacques were a sensible bunch and at times I got a chance to talk to them about their Metis origins and sample some of their special brews. Our bedroom was right over their Kitchen / Dining room with an entrance directly under us. Late one night we hear pounding on the door which continued until it was impossible to ignore anymore (I could hear then). Marilyn encouraged me to go down and see if perhaps some emergency was taking place as we could hear "Pierre open this door" repeatedly. Off I went to find Jacques "rocking on his feet" from tiredness or perhaps the result of too much alcohol. "What's the problem, Jacques?" I asked a bit abruptly as I needed my sleep. "Pierre has locked me out", he responded. "Don't you have your key?" I countered. "Well, there is no actual key for this door, Pierre has stuck a butterknife between the casing and over the door", Jacques explained. My patience had left me, and I took my shoulder to the door which opened, broken casing and all. The scene inside would surpass any movie that MGM could produce (at a reduced cost) as there on the couch projected ten (10) female toes pointing to ten (10) male toes with a blanket wrapped around two bodies.

"Well Jacques, you are in now. Will all this racket cease?" I was on my way out the door. "Oui", was the response.

About 5:00 A.M., the next morning we were awakened to the front doorbell ringing without stop. Again Marilyn, suggested that she was not going to answer and pushed me out of bed. I opened the door and

standing there was a Taxi-Driver with a pair of male overshoes in his hand. "A lady sent this to this address, collect!" It was an \$8.00 fare at that time, so I paid it to get rid of the guy. Later that morning I took the boots down to Jacques as Pierre was still "out of it". "I am not sure I know what all this is about, but I am sure you know the story." it was getting interestingly humorous now. "Yes, hid the shoes from Pierre's girlfriend and I suspect that she took his boots to get home and now has sent them back," his explanation sounded reasonable. "So, what are you going to do now," I was getting curious now. "Well, I will just send her high heels back to her collect!" he suggested.

It was an entertaining story for Marilyn as I went on to my studies.

Early one afternoon, Marilyn was surprised by plainclothesmen Saskatoon Police entering our Suite through the front and rear entrance with a "no knock" Search Warrant. They proceeded to open the fridge, closets and searched everywhere. Apparently, they were following up on a "tip" that Aunty was "bootlegging" homebrew. After ransacking our Suite and finally listened to Marilyn who likely "filled her pants" by this time, that Aunty now lived in the detached Suite at the rear of the property. They all left with "no goods" and went through Aunty's Suite with no luck. We heard later that they then went to the house where Aunty's daughter lived and were able to find a "mickey" of brew in the fridge but no evidence that there was any "marketing business" taking place. Yes, Marilyn talked about this even to this day about "the day her Suite was raided!"

The last incident was priceless. The Saskatoon Doukhobor Youth had plans to do a "Surprise Going Away Party" for us and had "leaked the secret to Aunty" so that she would not get alarmed when our Suite became overrun with people. The morning of the party, Aunty came over to our Suite muttering (in Russian), "Surprise Party, Surprise Party, some kind of surprise party tonight" Well Marilyn and I did our best to act surprised when the gang showed up later.

Apart from these events taking place, Marilyn and I were able to complete our "contract" and survived until I graduated. We could not have afforded anything different.

Engineers don't have classes in Psychology, Philosophy nor Psychiatry but were able to conduct all the laboratory Work.

Written by EWV March 23, 2024