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Bridge 1

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Oma and Opa’s

Like most people, over the course of my life I have thought I wanted to be a million different things when I grew up. When I was little most of them were pretty ridiculous, like being a tree or a fairy. During my pre-teen years, potential career choices included a guidance counselor, (why, at the age of 11 I wanted to be a guidance counselor is beyond me), an engineer, a hair dresser, and a vet. These career possibilities would vanish from my brain within a few months of me coming up with them, but the obsessive need to plan out my life and know exactly what I would be is something that never vanished. It wasn’t until my Opa passed away when I was 12 years old that I discovered what I really wanted to be.

I grew up in a large extended family-my mother was one of five siblings who each had two kids, so there were 10 cousins, of which I am the youngest, to hangout and play with growing up. My family spent nearly every vacation we got off from school together. We would all stay in my Oma and Opa’s house-a home my Opa, who was an architect, designed for the purpose of holding my whole family at once. My fondest childhood memories of thanksgiving, christmas, summer vacation, all took place in my Oma and Opa’s home.

When I was young I took my grandparents house for granted. To me it was just a place to play and stay overnight since we lived 6 hours away. But each year as I matured I began to appreciate it more and more, realizing how unique it was and how happy it made me to be there.

When you first pulled into the square driveway you couldn’t even see the house. My family and I would walk to the back left corner of the driveway and begin the short but majestic walk through the woods and over a bridge that led right up to my grandparent’s front door.

The house was 3 floors, and built on stilts. The front sliding door entered into the top floor and a white spiral staircase brought each visitor to the lower levels of the home. Each floor was filled with artifacts from the numerous countries they had visited-objects that now fill my home and the homes of my aunts and uncles since my grandparents have passed.

I never knew how much the house meant to me until my Opa passed away. Saying goodbye to him, which later on led to saying goodbye to the house, made me realize that part of my fondness for the house was because of the memories I had made there, but another part was because of the physical house itself. My Opa designed each aspect of the house in a way that he knew would make the visitors to the home have a positive reaction. I remember after kissing my Opa goodbye a week before he passed away, I wandered through the home on my own and took time to observe and absorb each physical aspect.

The top floor had thick, white, wall-to-wall carpeting that covered the entirety of the floor. Aside from the kitchen, the bathroom, and the glass wall looking into the sun room, there were no walls dividing the rooms on the top floor. From the living room one could look into the dining room, the cactus garden, the library, and my Opa’s workspace. Large windows lined the walls. The living room was adorned with a wall of masks from Africa which hung right beside the TV. It was hard to not get distracted by the masks while trying to watch a movie. There were two beautifully decorated orange couches that formed an L-shape by the television. Behind one of the couches was another seating area, with chairs my Opa made himself surrounding a circle class table. My mother’s paintings covered the wall beside the round seating area. Three little steps led us out of the living room into a long rectangular room that consisted of my Opa’s workspace, where the family would gather to play chess, the rotating round table where the grandchildren would eat during thanksgiving and christmas, and the piano that had been played on by each of my family members, regardless of whether they knew how to play or not.

A very narrow and steep spiral staircase carpeted with the same thick white carpet brought us to the middle level of the home. The middle floor was much less open than the top floor. To the left of the staircase was my Opa’s office, where all of his floor plans and notes from previous jobs were stored. He had a bright orange desk chair made out of wool that was too itchy to sit on. A doorway inside the office led to the indoor garden, one of the few rooms in the house without the white carpet. The ground was made out of stone, and there were all different kinds of tropical trees and bushes within the room made out of all-glass walls. Beside the indoor garden was one very large room that was divided into two sections. One section was a seating area, decorated with pear-shaped coffee tables, a white knit couch that covered the perimeter of the room, and hundreds of national geographic magazines. The other section of the room was the “slideshow room.” There was a projector, a screen, a couch and a few lounge chairs. After thanksgiving and christmas dinner my Oma and Opa would take everyone here and show us the slides from their most recent travels.

A double-sided painted partition that my mother made separated the seating areas from the bedroom side of the middle floor. A guest bedroom was located directly in front of the stair case. Two bathrooms to the right of the stairs, as well as my grandparents bedroom, which had lots of mirrors.

The lowest level of the house was the hangout spot for my cousins and I. There were two guest bedrooms on the left side of the basement, each with windows looking into the common area. A ping pong table sat in the center of the room. An exercise bike sat on the right side of the room in front of the train set my grandfather had built. The bottom two stairs of the carpeted spiral staircase moved and below the stairs was a cave-like area, also carpeted and containing lots of fuzzy blankets. Two papasan chairs rested outside the guest bedrooms and 12 foot tall windows on each end of the room were covered by very bright orange and red curtains which the sun shined right through.

Wandering around the house, paying attention to details I had merely walked past before made me realize that part of my fondness for the home was not just because of the memories I had there, but because of the physical house itself. Up until my Oma passed away two years later and the house had to be sold, I would go off on my own and wander the house each time I visited. I came to the conclusion that the way a house is designed and constructed, as well as what goes inside to decorate the home can truly affect how one feels.

The home my Opa designed made me realize that I wanted to do just what he had done for my family and I. I wanted to make spaces that made people feel good, create lasting memories, and cherish for the rest of their lives. I wanted to create spaces where each detail is carefully thought out, ensuring a positive reaction from those who live in them. I went from taking each unique aspect of the house for granted to appreciating every single design decision my Opa made. I discovered I wanted to create buildings that will make people feel the same love I have for my Oma and Opa’s house.