



Chapter Seven

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE



Psalm 139: 13-14

You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

In society, there is an unwritten law derived from the “human mind” that encourages people to plod along in a push-and-pull fashion pretending to be an exact replica of one another. Consequently, anyone who dares to soar like an eagle, using extra ordinary vision, is often ridiculed persecuted and bullied until uniformity is accomplished once again. Yet Scriptures clearly specify the fact that our Great Creator has breathed His character within the very fiber of each and every individual.

Thus, we are so fearfully and wonderfully made that there will never be a replica soul made of you and me. The poet, Helen Lowrie Marshall, in A Gift So Rare, stated that the glory of all creation rests on this very deviation. The charm of who we are depends upon these unique qualities; traits that many of us spend a life time trying to hide. After all, how will people react if we step out of the box with our thinking and actions; totally away from the acceptable norm of the madding crowd?

However, sometimes we have the great fortune of crossing paths with a person who dared to exit the cozy-tight cookie cutter space in which he lived and stepped into the sunlight with arms stretched wide open. Then as the first rays of sun bathed his face with soft glowing warmth, the realization that yesterday was the past and was pitifully lacking entered with such intensity that there was nothing left but forward motion. Since the door of sameness was forever closed, the part of him that was different from everyone else was all that would allow him to cross the barriers of society and follow his dream.

STITCH BY STITCH

The charm and unique qualities bestowed by God upon Dick O'Neill Du Puis, waiting in the wings for the right moment to surface, could no longer be kept in the special secret place. Thus, at age fourteen, Dick progressed from simply stitching rips and tears in his family's clothing to making their total wardrobes; all without a sewing machine. Recognizing their outfits were falling apart at the seams while doing the laundry, he solved the issue all on his own. He reasoned that by sewing French Seams when making their clothing, he would prevent the fraying and splitting of their garments. As you view the picture below of a French seam, it is important to note that Dick was totally self taught; without the finances to purchase sewing books or patterns. He just knew the garments were falling apart in the laundry and figured out a workable solution.



SHH—SHH—SHH! DON'T TELL!

Then, by age fifteen, not only could he sew and crochet, but was making all his mother's clothing, as well. Unfortunately, since Dick's passion for sewing was an embarrassment to his father, every member of the family was placed under a very strict "gag" order.

Therefore, if anyone asked about his mother's clothing, everyone in the family was to say the garments were purchased at the high end department store in New Orleans called Masion Blanc. (Ironically, when Dick had become a much sought after fashion designer of women's clothing, his garments were sold at this very store.) Dick's eyes beamed as he told about his mother driving to New Orleans just to look at the clothing he had created.

Unfortunately, the "gag order" and planned response to inquiries about the O'Neill family's beautiful clothing had a short life span. When a light shines as brightly as the sun, it is impossible to hide it under a bushel basket. Thus, the beauty and glamour that resulted from Dick's needle and thread spoke volumes on their own, commanding the attention from everyone.

Therefore, the "cat got out of the bag" when his sister was asked to be in a friend's wedding. Especially for the occasion, Dick made her a gown of sea foam green organza with a full base skirt and a low trousseau in the back. Across her hips, he placed two live gladiolas just prior

to her entrance down the aisle. Needless to say, this beautiful creation did not go unnoticed. As a result, Carole Rowe, the young lady who had been crowned as queen of the Rice Festival approached Dick's sister with a mission on her mind. She had fallen hopelessly in love with the gown and wanted to know where Dick's sister had purchased it. She would go to any length to locate that identical gown for her big event that was in the offing. Pressed to the point of insanity, his sister exclaimed, "My brother "Sonny" made it for me!" Busted! THE CAT WAS REALLY OUT OF THE BAG! No more lies! The news that Dick Du Puis had a God given gift of designing and sewing clothing spread like wildfire all over Gueydan. Also, this disclosure caused a time of reckoning for Dick's father. Would he support his son who had a talent and passion for an art that was considered to be feminine rather than masculine? Boys simply did not sew. They became welders!

As a result of this confrontation, Dick did design and sew the gown that Carol, the Rice Festival Queen wore that year. Interestingly, at the age of fifteen, Dick's eye for design was already formed. Even though Carol wanted a gown identical to the one his sister had worn in the wedding, Dick was astute enough to recognize Carol's shape dictated a different design. Already possessing knowledge beyond his years, he knew she simply would have been unable to wear the same style and color.

BROKEN BARRIERS

Given the fact that everyone in Gueydan now knew about Dick's incredible ability to sew, he decided the next step for him would be to sign up for home economics. After openly discussing it with his parents, his father finally resigned himself to the fact that his boy "Sonny" would not be a welder. Furthermore, it was at this juncture in Dick's life that his mother was given enough money by his father to purchase "Sonny" a new Singer sewing machine.

Thus, the matter now put to rest; Dick then approached the principal, Mr. Bush, with the request for enrolling in Home Economics. Since it was against society's rules, how could he allow this young man to enroll in a class viewed as only acceptable for women? In a very firm manner, he expressed to Dick and his mother that it would simply be improper for a man to make women's undergarments. However, Dick's mother suggested the decision be left up to the parents, instead. Consequently, after polling all the parents, it was decided Dick would be allowed to enter on a trial basis only. If anything unpleasant came up, he would be out of the program.

Unfortunately, the very first project Dick had to sew was a woman's half slip and matching under pants. Having sewn everything by hand for the females in his family, the project presented absolutely no challenge what so ever. However, as he carried the box containing

the finished slip and under pants to school, his friend TJ inquired about the contents of the package. Then, when discovering it contained women's under garments, he grabbed the box, pulled out its contents and proceeded to play touch and go with the other boys nearby. However, when the bell rang, everything was returned to an angry Dick who felt a bit of embracement about the whole thing.

Feeling flustered and out of sorts, Dick arrived in class just as the public address system came on requesting that all students proceed to the auditorium at once. Then when the audience settled, Principal Bush stood in front of the student body and announced firmly, "I saw something this morning that I never ever want to see again." He then began describing the incident that had occurred with Dick's project. He told them how much nerve it had required from Dick to enter the class and let one and all know their behavior was out of line. When Dick's parents heard about Principal Bush's stand, they were not only grateful, but extremely impressed. This principal had taken firm action against the behavior of bullying others.

After this incident, things progressed smoothly allowing Dick to thoroughly enjoy home economics. He vividly recalls classes being held in a romantic little cottage, rather than a sterile classroom in the main building. The students not only gardened, but learned all household responsibilities. A picket fence and an arbor with flowers growing over it offered a warm welcome at the main entrance. Inside, the cottage was beautifully appointed; including a formal dining room with a breakfront containing beautiful flatware. One important assignment was for six students to work as a team in preparing a meal to serve twelve people. Each student was allowed one guest for the fabulous six course meal. In addition to learning meal preparation, the cottage housed a nursery that contained a crib along with a doll that would wet its diaper so the students could understand the responsibilities of being a parent.

In comparison, the FFA program was equally spectacular which included a regular farm that was totally run by the students. They raised chickens and cows and learned to be responsible for all aspects of their care. They actually butchered the cows and were taught how to cut meat properly. The meat was then placed in the school freezer lockers which were then sold to the community. Since no freezers existed in Gueydan, people had a freezer just like a mailbox that contained their meat they had purchased. In short, Gueydan had a very advanced program that taught the students how to be responsible citizens in society.

LIFE IS GOOD

At this point in Dick's life, things had come full circle which allowed the opportunity for him to gain meaningful fun experiences that broadened his horizons. He was a popular young man who was well liked by both girls and boys. In fact, his photographs testify to this

popularity with the girls. However, he will become very serious when describing the respect he always showed to women. Since his mother held a special place in his heart, these feelings of respect automatically transferred toward all females.

After assisting his father with welding projects, Dick saved enough money to take his sister on an outing to New Orleans. Possessing a sense of adventure, he first made all the clothes they both would need and then drove excitedly toward the Big Easy. Signing the hotel register as Mr. and Mrs. O'Neill, allowed Dick and his sister to not only enjoy the finest accommodations but experience all New Orleans had to offer. Dick's age was never questioned because he looked older than his years; the results of such heavy responsibilities at age twelve.

THE OPEN SKY BECKONS

As Dick's graduation time approached, the wide open sky seemed to beckon him out into a world he longed to embrace. Although he loved his family beyond belief, he realized it was time to close the door and turn the key on his life as a southern boy residing in Gueydan, Louisiana. He had recognized at a very young age that his uniqueness caused him to not fit in with the norm. Thus, feeling his soul stand straight and tall, he made his final farewell to family and friends, possessing full knowledge that he would never return. Stitch by stitch this young man would sew silver threads into a tapestry so sensational that heads would turn as applause filled the air. Interestingly enough, his classmates added their blessing by voting Dick O'Neill Du Puis as the most likely to succeed.

(Dick and a couple of friends)



(Dick in school play)



(First girlfriend)



(Dress Dick made for his mother at age 15)



(Sketches by Dick at age 15 shows depth of gift for design)



DICK'S GIFT EMERGES



(Dress designed for Carole Rowe, the Rice Festival Queen)

Strapless light blue netting over matching taffeta lining with full skirt gathered to the fitted bodice making her already small waist look even smaller.

Home Economics

(Dick is in center third row below)



THE BIG EASY TRIP



(Dick and his sister Teta in New Orleans wearing the clothing he designed for them)