

CHAPTER LVIII

BUILDING HOMES

By George

Ruth and Howard started to build homes. They were dickering for a lot in Glen Ridge and had one in mind that seemed to them rather attractive. Fortunately, however, the law of inertia prevented their buying it before they learned that foreclosure proceedings had been started against the "Miller lot" on Hillside Avenue. The widow Miller raised enough cash to stop the foreclosure proceedings, but she was very anxious to sell - or so she said. Every time anyone offered to buy, however, she thought that the property was worth more than she was offered - and that's why the lot was vacant for over thirty years during which period all the other available land in the neighborhood had been sold as home sites.

When Grandfather heard of the Miller lot, he became convinced that it was a very desirable location and that it should be split up - Howard and Ruth building on one half and George and Dorothy on the other. It was a splendid idea, but it developed that there was a restriction in the deed which limited the use of the land to a single dwelling house. Howard tried to negotiate with Mrs. Miller to get a ninety-day option on the lot with the thought that during that time he could ascertain whether or not the restriction could be removed. It was also a fine idea, but Mrs. Miller would not tie up her property for that time even on the chance of selling, and the proposition was nearly dropped.

George, however, had still another idea. He sold Grandfather on the scheme of buying the lot and then if it developed that the restriction could not be removed, he, George, would build on the Miller lot and Ruth

and Howard would build on the lot which they had selected. In view of the fact that it was Grandfather's money that was to be used in purchasing the lot, George thought that this was a splendid plan; and Grandfather, foreseeing the stock market crash of the next year (Note by Editor - Grandfather saw that stocks were too high clearly enough to prefer to finance the children's homes rather than buy stocks. He only wishes that he had foreseen the crash clearly enough to convert into cash all his industrial stocks) and clearly realizing that real estate would not depreciate as much as some of his other investments would - and did - also thought that the plan had merit.

Now George, having gotten Grandfather to put up the money, got Howard to negotiate the purchase. Poor Mrs. Miller! She didn't have a chance against a Wall Street bond salesman. When she got through with it, she had sold the lot for fifteen hundred dollars less than the option price we had named the week before.

And then the fun began. The title company agreed to insure a clear title if we obtained releases from three adjoining land owners. Howard and George spent all winter trying to sell Messrs. Vogt, Mills and Anthony on the idea of letting them build two houses on the vacant lot which they were using as a dump, the kids of the neighborhood were using as a ball field and the mosquitoes were using as a breeding ground. You'd think that these adjoining landowners would have been so delighted at having such fine people come to live near them that they would have released the restriction right away, wouldn't you? Well, they not only didn't, but before we got all three of them signed on the dotted line, here's what we had agreed to do:

1. To build only one two-car garage or two one-car garages. (Mr. Vogt had a vacant half of his garage which he wanted to rent).
2. Not to build on more than twenty-five feet of frontage.
3. To build houses two and one-half stories high.

4. To build only one driveway and that between the two houses.
5. To contribute \$25.00 to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals!

If the neighbors had known what they were getting in for in the way of orchestra rehearsals, they would doubtless have required sound proof walls on both houses, but they didn't think of that until after the houses were complete.

It was just exactly one year after Grandfather took title to the lot when we obtained a release of the restrictions and were free to build the two houses. In the meantime, both families had drawn endless sets of plans and specifications and in the end went to the same architect to put them in final shape. In general it was understood that the houses would be similar in general outline but several differences in philosophy developed.

Ruth said that she wanted the living room on the back of the house so that it would look out over the garden (that is, George's garden) and wanted the laundry in the basement so that it would not steam up the kitchen on wash day. Dorothy was quite insistent, on the other hand, that she was not going to shake her kitchen mops at the people passing on the street and that she was not going to run all the way down cellar every time she had to wash out a pair of diapers. Which explains why Dorothy has her kitchen (including her set tubs) at the rear of the house and why, although the two houses look very much alike on the outside, they are so different on the inside. The surprising part of the story is that to this day each girl feels that her plan is satisfactory - which, after all, is as it should be.

Charles, however, after observing with interest the difficulties of building houses in Glen Ridge, bought a house already built about twenty miles away.