

DAD AND UNCLE MARK

A 7-Minute Monologue

by

Donald E. Baker

CHARACTERS (1M)

DOUG: A man perhaps in his seventies.

PLACE AND TIME

Indeterminate

SYNOPSIS

Doug, now in his seventies, recalls his thirteen-year-old self spying on Dad and "Uncle Mark" when they were supposed to be building birdhouses down in the basement workshop. What he sees through a knothole begins his own journey of sexual awareness but results in the destruction of his father's relationship with his oldest and dearest friend.

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from the author.

## DAD AND UNCLE MARK

When a guy asks me about when I figured out I was gay—usually in the afterglow of fantastic sex—and yes, sex can still be fantastic after age seventy—I always say 1958, when I was thirteen and before I'd ever heard the word “gay.” That year my parents transformed the basement into what they called the “rec room.” You never saw so much knotty pine paneling in your life. And I'm not talking about those cheap sheets of fake wood an eighth of an inch thick. Dad used substantial individual tongue-and-groove boards.

Uncle Mark helped him put them up. He wasn't really my uncle, but that's what you called your parents' close male friends back then. Dad and Uncle Mark had been best buddies since grade school. They did everything together.

As part of the remodeling, Mother let Dad section off the area closest to the furnace for a workshop. My Dad could build or fix anything. Pretty soon he and Uncle Mark started making fancy birdhouses together to sell at flea markets on the weekends. These were not your run-of-the-mill birdhouses from a kit. Oh, no. My Dad dreamed up birdhouse-size Victorian mansions. And French chateaus. Tara from *Gone with the Wind*. They even did an Empire State Building purple martin house one time. Uncle Mark was the artistic one. He'd paint those miniature masterpieces in all kinds of colors and put in every little detail.

Mother hated the sounds of sawing and hammering—said it brought on her sick headaches—so Dad and Uncle Mark would have their work sessions on Wednesday nights when she went out to her weekly bridge game. They'd never let me help. Said I'd just be in the way and the power tools were too dangerous. So while they were down there with the door shut, to keep the sawdust from going all over the place Dad said, I'd entertain myself watching TV or reading comic books or doing homework when I had to.

It was hard trying to study with all the noise from downstairs, but sometimes there'd be complete silence, usually for twenty minutes or so just before Uncle Mark left to go home. I was a nosy little brat so after a while I started to get curious. There was a place where a knot had fallen out of the knotty pine paneling.

What I saw Dad and Uncle Mark doing through that knothole was a real education. Remember, I was thirteen. I had only recently figured out my wee-wee wasn't just for wee-weeing anymore. (Yeah, my wee-wee. In the 1950's I don't think anybody even knew the correct names for body parts “down there.”) First off, the two of them were kissing each other. Full on the mouth. I never saw two guys do that before. Well, except in the wet dreams I'd started having a few months earlier. When my friends whispered about their own “nocturnal emissions”—as our priest called them—they always featured the cute girls in our class. Not mine. Mine were about the cute boys.

After the kissing, their adult-sized wee-wees came out, which was a revelation in itself. Then as things went along a whole new world opened up to me. My wet dreams got even more interesting for sure.

Naturally while I was spying on them my own wee-wee demanded attention. I tried to keep as quiet as I could but one night I let out a groan and my Dad heard it. I never saw Dad and Uncle Mark move so fast. Uncle Mark raced up the stairs and out the door. I ran for the stairs too, but Dad caught up with me and grabbed my arm so hard it left bruises. He never did anything like that to me before, but I realized later he was scared to death. He let me know in no uncertain

terms what would happen to me if I ever told anybody what I'd seen—especially if Mother ever found out. He said she'd probably shoot him and go to jail for murder and I'd end up in an orphanage. That scared the bejesus out of me. I promised cross my heart and hope to die not to tell a living soul. It was years before I finally did.

It wasn't long after the knothole incident that Uncle Mark moved to Chicago. There were Christmas cards for a few years but they stopped after Dad's heart attack. Years later I was in Chicago for a conference and I checked the phone book. If you don't know what a "phone book" is, ask your parents. As you can imagine there were a lot of people in the city with Uncle Mark's same name. I called a few of them but I never found him.

Then when the internet came in I finally found his obituary. Turns out he died just a few days after my Dad did. No cause of death listed. I hope the two of them met up again on their way up to the Pearly Gates. If they did, I got to figure by now heaven must be chock full of fancy birdhouses.

END OF MONOLOGUE