Last Day on a Fred C. Trump Construction Project

July 1959

Southridge Cooperative Apts.

Section 2- 92nd St. Jackson Heights Queens

The first week of July 1959 in one building of the Southridge Cooperative Apts. Construction site the hallways and stairways on all six floors getting one or two plaster coats over the base brown or “scratch” coat. The walls in the halls and stairways of these buildings were constructed of concrete masonry units (CM) with wire lath nailed to the face and covered over with a scratch coat. A white finished plaster went over this coat. The floors in the hallways were concrete.

Before applying the white plaster, it was important to scrape and remove excess drippings or “snots” that had been splashed on the walls from previous ceiling applications. In the process of scraping the walls and floors we used an ice scrapper, a tool with a sharp steel blade 7” wide, 6” in length and wielded with a 48” wooden handle.

After wall, hallway, floor surfaces or fire stairs were scraped Freddy and I would have to sweep up the debris and shovel it into- a wheelbarrow for removal off the floor. We built a small ramp at the end of each hallway and dumped the debris out the windows.

Construction laborers who have worked in this kind of environment know the amount of dust generated from scrapping the scratch coat. The dust gets in the nose, eyes, hair, and lungs. A respiratory nightmare that can be quite toxic with long-term effects.

To mitigate the terrible condition Freddie and I got two 5-gallon metal buckets and filled them with water. Then we searched for two or three of the larger type beer cans discarded by the workers lying about the building. Not hard to find two or three in the same spot. We then used an opener, “church key”, and perforated the top of the can in two more locations adjacent to the two originally made by the workers who drank the beer.

With four holes in the top of the can it easy submerged into the bucket and filled with water right away. What Freddie and I did was to drop three cans into the bucket at the same time and use the cans filled with water to sprinkle the floors so that we could keep the dust down. The hallways and staircases were literally a cloud of dust while we were doing the scrapping and sweeping. Sprinkling water kept the dust down to a manageable level and made breathing easier.

Well to be perfectly honest this was all well and good except that Mr. Trump did not want Freddie and me sprinkling water as we worked. He said it took too much time to stop scrapping and sweeping to take the additional step and time to sprinkle the water. I said to myself, years later, when thinking about the incident. Was this man a time and motion specialist or did he just enjoy seeing two young men miserable.

Each time Mr. Trump would come up on the floor and see for himself that the floors and stairs were wet he would say to us “How many times have I told you to stop sprinkling water”.

Though we could barely breathe if we did not sprinkle water he never relented in his demand. He had made the decision and was not going to back down. Always on the lookout for his Cadillac Fleetwood Series 75 Limo 9 passenger in Midnight Blue that would be parked on the street with the plate reading FCT we both knew sooner or later he was going to show. Then we would stop sprinkling water, and once he we knew he left the site we would continue. We knew that it would be a couple of days before he returned.

It was about the second week of July 1959 when he showed up with his business partner of many years William V. Tomasello, my mother’s brother. Uncle Bill also had the same identical blue1957 Fleetwood Series 75 Limo as Trump. Only difference the plate had JVT for James Vincent Tomasello my grandfather.

Both men were standing in the hallway where Freddy and I were working. The water can was there, and the beer cans were submerged ready for use when needed. “Freddy….Vincent how many times do I have to tell you etc. etc.” Trump never raised his voice but nevertheless it was in tone quiet menacing. There was a bit of a row with Uncle Bill taking on a very quiet demeanor but no doubt witness to the fact that I had totally disregarded Trump’s orders.

I do not know what I was thinking but before I knew it, I had thrown the broom I was using at Mr. Trump’s feet turned my back on him or walked past him and went down the few flights of stairs and out of the building.

That day I had the family second car, a silver 1952 four door Oldsmobile 88, that my father told me to take to work that day because he could not drop me off at Southridge before going to his job.

When I got to the car, I realized that I had locked the car in the morning when I arrived and left the keys on the front seat. Angry and without thinking, I grabbed a chunk of a concrete masonry unit (CMU) and smashed in the front driver’s side window. I cleaned out the glass on the seat, started the car and drove home. When my father came home from his job that evening, I told him what happened at Southridge and about my disagreement with Fred Trump, and Uncle Bill over the water cans and dust. “Good I’m glad you quit that SOB” he said. He also never reacted when I told him what I had done to the car window. He just got the window replaced a few days later.

Later in the month on July 27th, 1959, I arrived Marine Corps Base, Parris Island S.C. At the time I thought “Good riddance Mr. Trump Southridge and the 50 cents an hour you were paying me to clean up construction site shit for the last three summers. Then a thought hit me …. suppose I was using the ice scraper at the time of the confrontation?