

Big Hal and the Metallic Roof

by D. Curran

Grandpa always shook his head and chuckled while telling the story of the time his father, Big Hal, nearly caused a plane to land on the roof of their house. Grandpa's tale became legendary among our family and friends. It proved, Grandpa said, that Big Hal was the cheapest, craftiest, and most stubborn man in Sullivan County.

It started one September when Grandpa Hal told Grandma Gertie that he had purchased a big old house up on a mountain up north. Grandma Gertie, being well aware of her husband's parsimonious ways, was immediately suspicious.

Big Hal reassured her by explaining how the purchase would benefit them. They would be able to move out of their small rental, and Hal would have a quiet place to pursue his writing career. Additionally, he would be able to use his spare time fixing the house up for resale. Gertie was eager to move out of their cramped rental, even if they did have to move into a fixer-upper.

So they packed up three children under the age of seven, two furry friends, and two fish named Salt and Pepper. The whole family moved out to the house on the mountaintop. It was not in terrible shape, except for one problem. The place was so old that it had never been equipped with modern heating and insulation. The only heat came from some drafty fireplaces. As winter neared, every week in the house meant its occupants had to add another layer of clothing. Grandpa remembers wearing fuzzy mittens while he did his homework, making it a little difficult to hold a pencil properly.

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Grandma Gertie was not pleased with the chill. She worried the children would get sick, and she feared that it would only get colder as the winter progressed. But Big Hal insisted that the children would become stronger. "Gertie," he said, "this cold mountain air is good for the lungs. It'll toughen these city kids up."

"It's so cold, we might as well be living in a barn," Gertie said. "Our little rental is looking better all the time."

It wasn't until the night the fishtank water froze, sending poor little Salt and Pepper to a ice cube grave, that Gertie put her foot down and demanded Hal do something about the cold. When he went off to the hardware store, Gertie was sure he was going to come back with some kind of heater. He came home with something all right. Paint. Silver metallic paint. Enough to paint the entire roof.

Big Hal reasoned that the silver color would attract enough sunlight to heat the house. Instead it attracted all of the folks in the neighborhood. They watched in amazement as Big Hal turned his roof into a giant cookie tray. The neighborhood children, watching this spectacle, started calling out, "Hey Tinman, where's Dorothy?" The adults nearby chuckled.

"Go ahead and laugh," Big Hal shouted. "Because I will have the last laugh when you get your next delivery of heating oil, and you have to pay a king's ransom for it while I get my heat for free!"

If that wasn't bad enough, several days later the roof attracted a different type of attention. This time it was from the people who ran the local airport. Apparently, Big Hal's metallic roof was distracting to pilots. In fact, one fledgling pilot had become so

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flustered by the sparkling sight, that he made a beeline right for it during a flying lesson. It took all the control the instructor possessed to bring the plane back up in the air to safety.

This was all Grandma Gertie had to hear. "Hal," she asserted, "I know you're trying to save money, but I will not have our children be victims of a plane crash while they are sleeping *in their own beds!* Either the roof goes, or we go. *Tinman.*"

Big Hal couldn't argue with that logic. He hurried off to the hardware store again. This time he came back with gallons of thick black tar paint, along with five space heaters.

One day, after telling me and my brother the metallic roof story, Grandpa added some new information. He said that when he was a kid, the metallic roof incident led to the neighborhood kids giving him the nickname "T.J."

"Why T.J.?" we asked. "Your name is Hal, after your father, isn't it Grandpa?"

"The nickname ,T.J., is after my father," Grandpa said. "T.J. stands for Tinman Junior."

